

# Supporting Spoken Language in the Classroom

Case Studies from Early Years Settings  
and Primary Schools in Bristol



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## Early Years Settings and Primary Schools

### **Stoke Park Nursery and Primary School**

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# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Case Studies</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Stoke Park Nursery and Primary School:</b> Optimising the language supporting environment across Reception and Year 1 .....	<b>7</b>
<b>St Barnabas CE VC Primary School:</b> Developing use of language learning interactions in Reception through raising awareness, modelling and use of visual reminders.....	<b>11</b>
<b>Purple Childcare:</b> Developing children’s language learning by creating strong communication environments .....	<b>15</b>
<b>St. Ursula’s E-Act Academy:</b> Supporting communication through early identification of Speech, Language and Communication Needs and use of signs and symbols to understand the written and spoken word .....	<b>21</b>
<b>Easton CE Academy:</b> Improving and increasing opportunities for good quality spoken interaction by creating strong language learning environments .....	<b>29</b>
<b>St Nicholas of Tolentine Catholic Primary School:</b> Promoting oral language across the school and supporting language learning interactions in the EYFS and Year 1 class.....	<b>35</b>
<b>St Joseph’s Catholic Primary School Bristol:</b> Developing teaching assistants’ use of language learning interactions through peer mentoring .....	<b>39</b>
<b>Woodlands Academy:</b> Profiling classroom environments and increasing opportunities for language learning within the classroom.....	<b>43</b>
<b>Cabot Primary School:</b> Describing and supporting children’s SLCN and carefully monitoring progression in language interventions.....	<b>47</b>
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>51</b>



# Introduction

## What is SSLiC?

Supporting Spoken Language in the Classroom (SSLiC) is a knowledge exchange programme<sup>1</sup> that ultimately aims to improve communication and learning outcomes for all children. It seeks to achieve this aim by providing a forum for knowledge exchange between practitioners and researchers. There is a wealth of research in the area of speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), although there are still gaps in our understanding of how to apply this in practice in schools and the best ways to support school practitioners to embed communication in their school's policy and practice. If we, as practitioners and researchers, wish to see greater improvements in outcomes for all children starting in school and beyond, it is critical that we come together, over a sustained period of time, to investigate how the evidence base related to communication and oral language that does exist might be applied to a particular setting and then how this collective knowledge might be used to inform the wider community of 'what works' in schools for children.

To support this process the SSLiC programme has identified five evidence-informed domains around which schools can focus professional development and learning:

- Language Leadership
- Staff Professional Development and Learning
- Communication Supporting Classrooms
- Identifying and Supporting Speech, Language and Communication Needs
- Working with Others.

This report describes the activities, outcomes and learning from 9 early years settings and primary schools in Bristol across the 2022-2023 academic year. Each setting had access to research findings, a school self-assessment audit tool, an evidence-based classroom observation tool and received regular support from a facilitator with research and school practitioner backgrounds. All participants had the opportunity to share and evaluate their findings at the end of the academic year, the results of which have been published as case studies in this report.

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<sup>1</sup> The SSLiC Programme was developed as part of a series of knowledge exchange programmes at the Centre for Inclusive Education, UCL (<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/departments-and-centres/centres/ucl-centre-inclusive-education>)



## Raising attainment for children with language difficulties

Raising attainment for all children is at the heart of education and research has shown how language difficulties may be correlated with future academic performance<sup>2</sup>. When considering academic attainment, research literature has pointed to children with language difficulties attaining less well in national tests than their typically developing peers (TDP), both at the end of Key Stage 2<sup>3</sup> and end of Key Stage 4<sup>4,5</sup>.

Moreover, research into skills which are arguably necessary for classroom learning has shown some of the difficulties children with SCLN may have in acquiring those skills. Children with language difficulties, for example, have been shown to have difficulties with acquiring literacy skills<sup>6</sup>, writing difficulties<sup>7</sup>, difficulties with numeracy<sup>8</sup>, working memory<sup>9</sup> and executive functioning skills<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, we know that there is a relationship between language difficulties and problems with behaviour, and the difficulties that children with SCLN experience with their social and emotional skills<sup>11,12,13</sup>. This is pertinent as research suggests that attainment is linked to positive social and emotional wellbeing<sup>14</sup>.

The relationship between language and attainment is a complex one. SSLiC aims to foster a good language learning environment, and so provide support for literacy, support for learning and ultimately promote positive academic outcomes. Further, creating effective language learning environments can prepare children for the more challenging demands placed on oral language as they proceed through school, and can reduce the number of children experiencing SCLN.

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  - 4 Dockrell, J., Lindsay, G., & Palikara, O. (2011). Explaining the academic achievement at school leaving for pupils with a history of language impairment: Previous academic achievement and literacy skills. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 27(2), 223-237.
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  - 6 Stothard, S. E., Snowling, M. J., Bishop, D., Chipchase, B. B., & Kaplan, C. A. (1998). Language-Impaired Preschoolers: A Follow-Up Into Adolescence. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 41(2), 407-418.
  - 7 Dockrell, J., Ricketts, J., Charman, T., & Lindsay, G. (2014). Exploring writing products in students with language impairments and autism spectrum disorders. *Learning and Instruction*, 32, 81-90.
  - 8 Harrison, L. J., McLeod, S., Berthelsen, D., & Walker, S. (2009). Literacy, numeracy, and learning in school-aged children identified as having speech and language impairment in early childhood. *International Journal of Speech and Language Pathology*, 11(5), 392-403.
  - 9 Baddeley, A. (2003). Working memory and language: An overview. *Journal of Communication Disorders*, 36(3), 189-208.
  - 10 Henry, L. A., Messer, D. J., & Nash, G. (2012). Executive functioning in children with specific language impairment. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 53(1), 37-45.
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  - 12 Yew, S. G. K., & O'Kearney, R. (2013). Emotional and behavioural outcomes later in childhood and adolescence for children with specific language impairments: meta-analyses of controlled prospective studies. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 54(5), 516-524
  - 13 Conti-Ramsden, G., & Botting, N. (2008). Emotional health in adolescents with and without a history of specific language impairment (SLI). *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines*, 49(5), 516-525
  - 14 Gutman, L. M., & Vorhaus, J. (2012). The impact of pupil behaviour and wellbeing on educational outcomes. Department for Education, London.

# Case Studies

## Stoke Park Nursery and Primary School

### Optimising the language supporting environment across Reception and Year 1

#### Research Team and Setting

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## Background

Stoke Park is in the Lockleaze area of Bristol. The school has a nursery provision and, in the academic year 2022-2023, a total of 238 children were on the school register. 32% of the school population is eligible for free school meals. Research has suggested that social disadvantage is more often linked to children experiencing language difficulties<sup>15</sup>. Close to 40% of children at school have English as an Additional Language (EAL), another factor that has been associated with an increased risk in children underachieving in their education<sup>16</sup>. School staff at Stoke Park Nursery and Primary school have also noticed that language learning needs have increased in Reception and Year 1 following the Covid-19 pandemic, a concern recognised nationally<sup>17,18</sup>. Prior to the start of the SSLiC Project, the school has had involvement from the Voice 21 Project<sup>19</sup>, a programme which works with schools to support the development of children's use of language to express their ideas and communicate effectively. As a result of this, the School Improvement Plan has focused on providing opportunities for children to develop their oral language skills across all subject areas.

As part of the SSLC Project, a Communication Team came together with representation across the school team to ensure optimal impact of the project. Research outlining best practice to support change in educational practice suggests greatest impact can be achieved when those in leadership roles work closely with staff across the school<sup>20</sup>. The Communication Team initially completed the SSLiC Self-Assessment School Audit and identified areas of good practice in identification of speech, language and communication

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- 15 Law, J., Lindsay, G., Peacey, P., Gascoigne M., Soloff, N., Radford, J., Band, S., and Fitzgerald, L. (2000) Provision for children's speech and language needs in England and Wales: facilitating communication between education and health services. DfES research report 23.
- 16 Strand, S., Malmberg, L. and Hall, J., (2015). English as an Additional Language (EAL) and educational achievement in England: An analysis of the National Pupil Database.
- 17 Tracey, L., Bowyer-Crane, C., Bonetti, S., Nielsen, D., D'Apice, K. and Compton, S. (2022). The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Children's Socio-Emotional Wellbeing and Attainment during the Reception Year. Research Report. Education Endowment Foundation.
- 18 Bakopoulou, I. (2022). The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in early years transitions to school in the UK context. Education 3-13, DOI: 10.1080/03004279.2022.2114807.
- 19 Voice 21 | Oracy | United Kingdom accessed 5th June 2023
- 20 Kotter, J.P. (2012). Leading Change. Boston, Mass: Harvard Business Review Press

needs (SLCN) and early support for children with SLCN through the Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) programme<sup>21</sup> (a programme which aims to support children with lower than expected language skills in small group activities as they transition from nursery to reception). The Communication Team recognised that strong collaboration existed between the Nursery and Reception teachers in supporting communication but acknowledged that collaboration between Reception and the Year 1 teacher was less established.

In addition, observations in Reception and Year 1 using the Communication Supporting Classrooms Observation Tool (CSCOT)<sup>22</sup> were conducted to profile the language learning environments and gather more information about existing good practice and areas for development. From these two tools, school staff identified opportunities to strengthen their language learning environments in the Reception and Year 1 class. Research has pointed to the importance of the physical environment of a classroom on both the amount of oral language experiences and the quality of these experiences<sup>23</sup> demonstrating that an optimal communication environment can facilitate broader range of language experiences<sup>24</sup>. It was, therefore, decided that the focus of the Stoke Park SSLiC Project will be to create strong language learning environments.

## What was done?

### Creating strong language learning environments

The Reception teacher met with the Year 1 teacher to identify opportunities to strengthen the language learning environment across each classroom. Research<sup>25</sup> highlights that the physical set up of the classroom can facilitate language learning and suggests four key areas within this including: organising the classroom to emphasise open space; ensuring key areas are clearly defined; materials are available

that prompt creativity and problem solving; and finally, role play areas that allow for dramatic play. Increasing the open space within the Reception class included reorganising key learning areas, such as the carpet-time area, the role play area, the book corner, and the crafts and art area. The teachers also identified a need to redefine these areas to ensure the different learning areas were clearly visible to and accessible by the children.

The Communication Team acknowledged that as children moved into Year 1, there was a greater expectation for children to engage in desk-based learning and increased adult-led teaching which resulted in less child-led activities. However, they recognised that both Reception and Year 1 class had a role play area that could benefit from further development to optimise the language learning opportunities offered to children. They worked on defining each area more clearly, considering the play activities each area could offer, developing the use of props to encourage vocabulary development and developing use of artifacts to support communication and literacy. Communication supportive classrooms put an emphasis on providing resources that support language development by introducing and encouraging the use of a range of vocabulary (such as maps and menus)<sup>26</sup>. Finally, to support the transition of children from Reception to Year 1, class teachers identified a benefit in reorganising resources across each class and increasing the use of labelling with words and pictures to support children's access to resources.

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- 21 Sibieta, L., Kotecha, M. and Skipp, A. (2016). Nuffield Early Language Intervention: Evaluation Report and Executive Summary. Education Endowment Foundation.
- 22 Dockrell, J.E., Bakopoulou, I., Law, J., Spencer, S., & Lindsay, G. (2012). Communication Supporting Classroom Observation Tool. Freely available from: [https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/media/93866/tct\\_bcrp\\_csc\\_final.pdf](https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/media/93866/tct_bcrp_csc_final.pdf)
- 23 Roskos, K., & Neuman, S. B. (2002). Environment and its influences for early literacy teaching and learning. In S. B. Neuman & D. K. Dickinson (Eds.), *Handbook of early literacy research* (pp. 281-294). New York: The Guildford Press.
- 24 Dockrell, J., Bakopoulou, I., Law, J., Spencer, S., & Lindsay, G. (2015). Capturing communication supporting classrooms: The development of a tool and feasibility study. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 31(3), 1-16.
- 25 Roskos, K., & Neuman, S. B. (2002). Environment and its influences for early literacy teaching and learning. In S. B. Neuman & D. K. Dickinson (Eds.), *Handbook of early literacy research* (pp. 281-294). New York: The Guildford Press.
- 26 Justice, L.M. (2004). Creating Language-Rich Preschool Classroom Environments. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 36-44.



## What were the findings and outcomes of the project?

The main outcome of the Stoke Park SSLiC Project is clear evidence of the Reception and Year 1 class teachers recognising the importance of a strong language learning environment for language learning. Findings from repeat observations using the CSCOT pointed to significant positive changes to the language learning environment across Reception and Year 1. The Communication Team noted that the learning areas in Reception and Year 1 are now clearly defined and areas, learning activities and resources are now consistently labelled with pictures and words. In both classes, there are visual displays up that invite children to comment. Use of visuals across classrooms is identified in research as beneficial to all children and especially to those with SLCN<sup>27</sup>. Finally, both classes have developed their role play areas, which are now clearly defined, labelled and include an increased range of toys and objects, such as small world toys and real/natural resources.

## Key learning

The Stoke Park SSLiC Project has demonstrated the importance of class teachers profiling their classroom environment to identify elements that are supportive of language and communication. Research often highlights concerns as to how little attention teachers pay to empirical evidence when making decisions regarding the physical set up of classrooms<sup>28</sup>. The Stoke Park SSLiC Project has demonstrated that key to implementing evidence-based approaches is the active engagement of class teachers in this process alongside the use of a repeatable and robust observation tools, such as the CSCOT<sup>29</sup>.

Another key learning from the Stoke Park SSLiC Project is the importance of collaboration of educational staff across different year groups. Schools are increasingly driven by attainment targets, and this shapes how much teachers can prioritise communication in the classroom over specific curriculum activities, especially beyond the EYFS. Changes in the classroom environment are often observed across year groups with children in Year 1 and Year 2 having far fewer communication relevant resources than children in Reception classes<sup>30,31</sup>. Working together across Reception and Year 1 has allowed the Communication Team to reflect on the important aspects of the physical environment in supporting language learning especially as children move into Year 1 where learning is a more structured, formalised experience. In doing this, teachers have been able to successfully provide children with evidence-based learning opportunities in both Reception and Year 1 optimising the environment to support language learning.

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27 Wellington, W. and Stackhouse, J. (2011). Using visual support for language and learning in children with SLCN: A training programme for teachers and teaching assistants. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 27(2), pp.183-201.

28 Dagenais, C., Lysenko, L., Abrami, P.C., Bernard, R.M., Ramde, J., & Janosz, M. (2012). Use of research-based information by school practitioners and determinants of use: a review of empirical research. *Evidence & Policy: A Journal of Research, Debate and Practice*, 8(25), 285-309. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1332/174426412X654031>.

29 Law, J., Tulip, J., Stringer, H., Cockerill, M., & Dockrell, J. (2019). Teachers observing classroom communication: An application of the Communication Supporting Classroom Observation Tool for children aged 4-7 years. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 35(3), 203-220.

30 Dockrell, J.E., Bakopoulou, I., Law, J., Spencer, S., & Lindsay, G. (2016). Capturing communication supporting classrooms: The development of a tool and a feasibility study. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 31(3), 271-286.

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## St Barnabas CE VC Primary School

**Developing use of language learning interactions in Reception through raising awareness, modelling and use of visual reminders**

### Research Team and Setting

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Dr Ioanna Bakopoulou, SSLiC Programme Lead,  
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## Background

St Barnabas CE VC Primary school is a one-form entry primary school in central Bristol. The school has a high number of children with English as an Additional Language (EAL) which was at 54% at the start of the SSLiC Project and a high level of children with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) (24% of the school population at the start of the SSLiC Project). The school also has a high level of pupils eligible for free school meals (62%). Research has found that children entering nursery in socially disadvantaged areas more frequently experience language difficulties<sup>32</sup> even when other cognitive skills are within the expected range<sup>33</sup>. A significant area of the School Improvement Plan has been to develop children's early language acquisition with a particular focus on strengthening the provision for children with EAL. Alongside this, there is a focus on increasing the number of children reaching expected standards of writing. Research has found that oral language skills are key in the development of both reading and writing<sup>34,35,36</sup> and that environments that support language development can support literacy<sup>37</sup>. The school's recent Ofsted feedback had reinforced the priority of language with feedback noting that staff needed to have higher expectations of children's oral language.

During the first stage of the SSLiC Project, the school received the news that it would be closing at the end of the academic year and, as a result, pupil numbers decreased significantly in the duration of the academic year. By May 2023, there were 38 pupils attending the school which had also led to an increase in the percentage of pupils with EAL (60%) and pupils with SEND (33%).

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- 32 Law, J., Lindsay, G., Peacey, P., Gascoigne M., Soloff, N., Radford, J., Band, S., and Fitzgerald, L. (2000). Provision for children's speech and language needs in England and Wales: facilitating communication between education and health services. DfES research report 23.
- 33 Locke, A., Ginsborg, J., & Peers, I. (2002). Development and disadvantage: implications for the early years and beyond. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders*, 37(1), 3-15.
- 34 Stothard, S. E., Snowling, M. J., Bishop, D., Chipchase, B. B., & Kaplan, C. A. (1998). Language-Impaired Preschoolers: A Follow-Up Into Adolescence. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 41(2), 407-418.
- 35 McLeod, S., Berthelsen, D., & Walker, S. (2009). Literacy, numeracy, and learning in school-aged children identified as having speech and language impairment in early childhood. *International Journal of Speech and Language Pathology*, 11(5), 392-403.
- 36 Shanahan, T. (2006) Relations among oral language, reading and writing development. In MacArthur, C., Graham, S. and Fitzgerald, J. (eds), *Handbook of Writing Research*, Guilford Press, New York, 171-83.
- 37 Snowling, M.J., & Hulme, C. (2011) Evidence-based interventions for reading and language difficulties: Creating a virtuous circle. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 81(1), 1-23.

## What was done?

In order to support change across the school, a Communication Team was set up consisting of the SENCo (at the time) and the Reception class teacher. Analysis of the SSLiC Self-Assessment School Audit identified a number of areas of strength in the school's overall language provision and a few developing areas. Specifically, they noted that the importance of communication was evident in their School Improvement Plan and that identification and support of children with Speech Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) was a well-developed part of the school's provision. However, in identifying this, the Communication Team recognised that all teaching staff needed to be aware of language learning interaction techniques themselves to ensure good practice could be demonstrated across environments. In considering effective professional development and learning, the Communication Team reflected that, although teaching staff had had opportunities to develop in this area, feedback from Ofsted suggested more needed to be done to ensure all staff were supporting oral language to enable children to reach their potential. The importance of the adult role for language learning is well supported by research<sup>38,39</sup>, which evidences that the way adults talk and tune into children can enhance their language<sup>40</sup>. Adults can make a significant difference in children's language development by maximizing the quality of their language interactions<sup>41</sup>.

The Communication Team completed the Communication Supporting Classrooms Observation Tool (CSCOT)<sup>42</sup> in the Reception class which they then reviewed together. In reviewing observations, they noted strengths in the Language Learning Environment dimension (LLE), including the presence of well-defined

areas which are clearly labelled, which according to research, is a key element of a strong language learning environment<sup>13</sup>.

Findings from the CSCOT also pointed to evidence of a range of language learning interaction (LLI) techniques being used in conversations with children, such as open questions. However, there was an acknowledgement that many of the LLIs were not consistently used across all staff and some more advanced techniques were used less frequently (such as commenting and scripting). Research highlights that adults taking opportunity to offer a range of linguistic forms and sentence structures through extending, commenting, scripting can support children in using more complex language<sup>43,44,45</sup>. Therefore, increasing adults use of these techniques and ensuring consistency of use amongst all adults in the classroom can aim to impact language positively.

To increase the use of language learning interaction techniques across all members of staff when communicating with children, with a focus on extending, commenting and scripting.

The Reception class teacher and Teaching Assistant collected more information by observing each other and profiling the LLI techniques used in Reception class across the day in a range of activities. In a reflective conversation following the observations, the Reception class teacher and Teaching Assistant both noted that in their interactions they both used open questions as the main language learning interaction technique but used commenting on what children were doing much less frequently.

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- 38 Hoff, E. (2003). The specificity of environmental influence: Socioeconomic status affects early vocabulary development via maternal speech. *Child Development*, 74, 1368-1378.
- 39 Desforges, C., & Abouchar, A. (2003). The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment: a literature review. DfES, Nottingham
- 40 Chapman, R. S. (2000). Children's language learning: An interactionist perspective. *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines*, 41(1), 33-54
- 41 Law, J., Charlton, J., Dockrell, J., Gascoigne, M., McKean, C., & Theakston, A. (2017). *Early Language Development: Needs, provision, and intervention for preschool children from socio-economically disadvantage backgrounds*. Institute of Education, London.
- 42 Dockrell, J.E., Bakopoulou, I., Law, J., Spencer, S., & Lindsay, G. (2012). *Communication Supporting Classroom Observation Tool*. Freely available from: [https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/media/93866/tct\\_bcrp\\_csc\\_final.pdf](https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/media/93866/tct_bcrp_csc_final.pdf)
- 43 Theakston, A., Ibbotson, P., Freudenthal, D., Lieven, E. and Tomasello, M. (2015). Productivity of noun slots in verb frames., *Cognitive Science*, 39 (6), pp. 1,369-95.
- 44 Dockrell, J., Bakopoulou, I., Law, J., Spencer, S., & Lindsay, G. (2015). Capturing communication supporting classrooms: The development of a tool and feasibility study. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 31(3), 1-16.
- 45 Wasik BA and Bond,MA (2001) Beyond the pages of a book: Interactive book reading and language development in preschool classrooms. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 93(2), 243-50.

Following observations, the Communication Team presented the findings of their observations to the EYFS team, aiming to raise awareness of different LLI techniques and provide information about the evidence base behind their effectiveness. The Communication Team also decided to use visual prompts of these techniques for staff to refer to. Using resources from Better Bilingual<sup>46</sup>, the Communication Team put together visual prompts which were displayed in key places around the school's EYFS provision including the role play area and craft area. The Communication Team finally identified that putting visuals on lanyards for staff to have with them in key learning areas outside of the classroom would ensure a more consistent use of the techniques across all areas of the school.

## What were the findings and outcomes of the project?

The main findings of the St Barnabas SSLiC Project was an increased use of language learning interaction techniques that were not frequently used before. Repeat observations using the CSCOT between the Reception class teacher and the Teaching Assistant noted an increase in the use of commenting, extending and scripting for both. Observations findings also showed an impact across the whole staff in EYFS in the use of LLI techniques being used more and, in particular, scripting, extending and commenting. As a result of increased use of LLI techniques, there was also an increase in all language learning opportunities, such as children having more opportunities to engage in structured conversations with teachers and other adults. There is strong evidence that children having opportunities to engage in structured conversations with adults supports language learning<sup>47,48</sup>.

## Key learning

There have been many challenges to the implementation of the SSLiC Programme in St Barnabas CE VC Primary School, the most significant of them relate to the school closure at the end of the academic year. A significant number of children had relocated to different schools during the academic year and there were some staff changes impacting on the school's structure with classes combined as they became smaller. This meant that the Communication Team needed to be flexible in implementation of the SSLiC Project to ensure children were best supported.

However, there were also a number of successes from this project, particularly in relation to staff professional development. For example, it was described how the project had provided an opportunity for staff to work together to make meaningful changes in their classrooms and the Communication Team noted the benefits of staff working collaboratively in this way. There was also a strong sense that including all staff in their own professional development goals helped to give a sense of ownership of a common goal and encouraged positive engagement.

Finally, using robust and evidence-based tools that are repeatable, such as the CSCOT, was considered important as a means of staff professional development with a focus on regular opportunities to provide constructive peer feedback to identify areas for personal and school development and address these in everyday teaching practice. The Communication Team recognised that the benefits of the progress made in adult-child interactions would be skills that all staff would take forward as they move on to future roles which will benefit children with language learning needs in other educational settings.

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46 Better Bilinguals: Enhancing outcomes for Bilingual Learners in collaboration with educational settings. Available at: [www.betterbilingual.co.uk](http://www.betterbilingual.co.uk)

47 Best, W., Melvin, D., & Williams, S. (1993). The effectiveness of communication groups in day nurseries. *European Journal of Disordered Communication*, 28, 187-212.

48 Bickford-Smith, A., Wijayatilake, L., & Woods, G. (2005). Evaluating the Effectiveness of an Early Years Language Intervention. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 21(3), 161-173.



## Purple Childcare

Developing children's language learning by creating strong communication environments

### Research Team and Setting

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## Background

Purple Childcare is an independent nursery based in North Bristol. It is registered to take babies (under two years old) and has separate rooms for toddlers (below three years) and pre-school children (aged three to five years). The Purple Childcare SSLiC Project focussed on the pre-school element of the nursery and during the duration of the project there were an average of 34 children attending on any day. There are four separate rooms inside the nursery for pre-school children: a main, busy room, the lunch/quiet room, a Special Educational Needs room, and a role play area. There is also an outdoor play area. The nursery had recently undergone a re-organisation with the toddler and pre-school provision having swapped around.

Naomi and Parys completed the SSLiC Self-Assessment School Audit which identified a number of strengths in the setting. Staff attended regular training regarding Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) and, as a result, Naomi and Parys felt that staff professional development and learning was well developed within the setting. This was evident on the Identification and Supporting SLCN domain of the Audit, as staff were able to recognise features of SLCN in children and provide appropriate interventions for these children. However, on reflection, Naomi and Parys noted that the time offered for intervention for SLCN had reduced recently due to other priorities within the nursery. The Bercow Report: 10 years on<sup>49</sup> highlighted that this was a cause for concern across the UK, with many children still receiving inadequate support for speech, language and communication due to a lack of insufficient resourcing. Nursery staff reflected on the importance of providing language interventions on a regular basis and were keen for interventions to become embedded into the daily routine of the pre-school setting. The Communication Supporting Classrooms domain of the SSLiC Self-Assessment School Audit was also highlighted as an area for development within the nursery. As the rooms had been re-organised recently, there was a great opportunity to use the Communication Supporting Classrooms Observation Tool (CSCOT)<sup>50</sup> to determine

49 Bercow (2018) 337644-ICAN-Bercow-Report-WEB.pdf (bercow10yearson.com) accessed 5th June 2023

50 Dockrell, J.E., Bakopoulou, I., Law, J., Spencer, S., & Lindsay, G. (2012). Communication Supporting Classroom Observation Tool. Freely available from: [https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/media/93866/tct\\_bcrp\\_csc\\_final.pdf](https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/media/93866/tct_bcrp_csc_final.pdf). Accessed 5th June 2023

how the nursery environment now supported language and communication for all children.

Naomi and Parys used the CSCOT to observe the pre-school area and spent time reflecting on the Language Learning Environment dimension to review how the setting could be organised to promote speech, language and communication development. Within the environment, there were multiple areas highlighted which could be changed to encourage communication between children and adults. An environment which promotes communication has been recommended as a universal strategy for developing children's speech, language and communication skills<sup>51</sup>. Key features of the physical environment within classroom settings have been identified as being beneficial for communication are included in the CSCOT<sup>52</sup>. These environmental features enhance speech, language and communication by increasing the quality and quantity of children's language experiences.

The CSCOT highlighted areas within the Language Learning Interactions dimension that could be strengthened within the pre-school setting to improve children's language development. For example, although there were strengths in staff-child interactions (such as, adults drawing the child's attention before speaking and ensuring that they were on the child's level), there were inconsistent use of more advanced language learning interaction techniques, such as extending language and asking open-ended questions. There is evidence that there is a relationship between the communicative interactions that adults have with children in early education settings and children's language skills<sup>53</sup>. Moreover, the use of specific techniques, such as extending language and asking open-ended questions, have been demonstrated to have a positive effect on children's language learning<sup>54,55,56</sup>.

Having completed the SSLiC Self-Assessment School Audit and the CSCOT, Naomi and Parys were keen to make changes to the environment to improve speech, language and communication for all children. They were also motivated to re-introduce interventions for children identified as having SLCN on a routine basis. These became the two priority areas for change at the setting.

## What was done?

Naomi and Parys formed a Communication Team to champion communication within the setting. They were supported by Senior Leadership and given permission to make any changes required within the environment that would support speech, language and communication for children. The Education Endowment Foundation highlights the importance of senior leadership in implementation of new practices to improve the quality of education settings<sup>57</sup>. As a Communication Team, they met with other members of staff at the nursery to discuss the findings of the CSCOT and highlight areas for change and why these were important for communication. Staff throughout the setting became engaged in making changes to the environment and supported Naomi and Parys with this.

### Organise the space within the pre-school rooms to promote speech, language and communication

It was agreed that the first step would be to re-organise the toys and equipment within the four different rooms so that each area was themed and learning areas were clearly defined. This has been reported as being beneficial for developing communication skills<sup>58</sup>. This incorporated moving some equipment around and removing items that were no longer used or required. While everything was re-organised, Naomi and Parys ensured that resources were clearly labelled using a combination of the written word, photos and symbols.

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- 51 Crosskey, L. & Vance, M. (2011). Training teachers to support pupils' listening in class: An evaluation using pupil questionnaires. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 27(2), pp.165-182.
- 52 Roskos, K. and Neuman, S.B. (2001). Environment and its influences for early literacy teaching and learning. *Handbook of early literacy research*, pp.281-292.
- 53 Hadley, E. B., Barnes, E. M., & Hwang, H. (2022). Purposes, places, and participants: A systematic review of teacher language practices and child oral language outcomes in early childhood classrooms. *Early Education and Development*, 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2022.2074203>
- 54 Girolametto, L., & Weitzman, E. (2002). Responsiveness of child care providers in interactions with toddlers and pre-schoolers. *Language, Speech and Hearing Services in Schools*, 33, 268-281
- 55 Cabell, S.Q., Justice, L.M., Piasta, S.B., Curenton, S.M., Wiggins, A., Turnbull, K.P., & Petscher, Y. (2011). The impact of teacher responsivity education on preschoolers' language and literacy skills. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 20(4), 315-330.
- 56 Girolametto, L., Weitzman, E., & Greenberg, J. (2006). Facilitating language skills – In-service education for early childhood educators and preschool teachers. *Infants and Young Children*, 19(1),36-49.
- 57 Education Endowment Foundation (2019) [EEF Implementation Guidance Report 2019.pdf \(d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net\)](#) accessed 8th June 2023
- 58 Bond, M.A. and Wasik, B.A., 2009. Conversation stations: Promoting language development in young children. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 36, pp.467-473.



This can aid understanding of the spoken word and, therefore, help to develop children's communication skills<sup>59</sup>.

They also ensured that boxes were within reach of the children so that they could access the resources they wanted but were also able to put things away as required.

Prior to the re-organisation, the setting was well resourced with appropriate toys, but, at the time of the SSLiC Project, these were not always easily accessible to the children. For example, there were small world objects available in the form of a doll's house but the positioning of this meant that children did not frequently access it. Similarly, the dressing up clothes were in front of the kitchen role play area and so this was not often visited by the children. Items were moved to maximise opportunities for children to access a range of toys and increase the time they spent communicating through play.

Another area identified to be changed was the reading area which was based in the quiet room. Staff felt that the number of books available were perhaps overwhelming as children did not regularly access the area or spend a long time looking at books. While this was intended to be a quiet area, staff felt that it was busy and not always quiet enough for children to enjoy the books. There is evidence that noise levels can affect how well children process language<sup>60,61</sup> and so by creating a quiet environment, children have the opportunity to develop their communication skills. Naomi and Parys reduced the number of books on display and themed them according to the topic that was taking place within the setting. They also ensured that there were books available for children's particular interests and that there was a mixture of both fiction and non-fiction books available. There is evidence for the positive effects of providing a range of

books for developing children's speech, language and communication skills<sup>62,63,64,65</sup>. They created a cosier feel to the reading area using soft furnishings. Staff regularly reminded children that this is a quiet area and that they can use either the main noisy room or the outdoor area for louder activities.

Once these areas had been rearranged, with clear learning areas defined and boxes labelled, posters were introduced in each of the areas to remind staff of key principles for supporting speech, language and communication. The posters were used as prompts for staff to think about that particular area and consider whether children were using the area appropriately and to ensure the longevity of the changes. Visual prompts were also used to remind nursery staff of more advanced language learning interaction techniques, such as open-ended questions.

### Re-introduce intervention for children identified as having SLCN

In the past, staff at Purple Childcare had been trained to deliver the Early Talk Boost programme<sup>66</sup>. This is an evidence-based intervention designed to provide targeted support to children who staff identify as having SLCN. The programme had been introduced and used within the nursery, but, over time, equipment required to deliver the intervention had become less accessible and staff had found that they didn't have enough time to deliver it as they had been spending time tidying up and organising the classrooms throughout the day. However, the Communication Team was highly motivated to re-introduce this intervention on a regular, routine basis.

As the rest of the setting was being re-organised, the resources required to deliver Early Talk Boost were collected and made easy to access. Staff had already identified children who would benefit from the

59 Justice, L.M. (2004). Creating Language-Rich Preschool Classroom Environments. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 36-44.

60 Dockrell, J.E. and Shield, B.M. (2006). Acoustical barriers in classrooms: The impact of noise on performance in the classroom. *British Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), pp.509-525.

61 Lasky, E. & Tobin, H. (1973) Linguistic and nonlinguistic competing message effects, *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 6, 243-250

62 Collins, M. (2010). ELL preschoolers' English vocabulary acquisition from story book reading. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 25, 84-97

63 Koshinen, P. S., Blum, I. H., Bisson, S. A., Phillips, S. M., Creamer, T. S., & Baker, T. K. (2000). Book access, shared reading, and audio models: The effects of supporting the literacy learning of linguistically diverse students in school and at home. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 92(1), 23-36

64 Justice, L. M., Meier, J., & Walpole, S. (2005). Learning new words from storybooks: Findings from an intervention with at-risk kindergarteners. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, 36, 17-32

65 Justice, L. M., & Pence, K. (2005). *Scaffolding with storybooks: A guide for enhancing young children's language and literacy achievement*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association

66 Speech and Language UK (2015.) [early-talk-boost-evaluation2015.pdf \(speechandlanguage.org.uk\)](#) accessed 2nd June 2023

intervention and so it was timetabled to take place twice per week, every week. The Nursery's Senior Leadership Team supported the changes to the timetable, and intervention sessions started as soon as possible. These have taken place on a routine basis and have become embedded into the weekly planning of the Nursery. Progress of the children who are involved in this intervention is now being routinely collected and tracked.

### Supporting the use and understanding of children's vocabulary

Alongside this targeted intervention, it was agreed that the topics used within the setting would have a focus on vocabulary. Prior to starting the SSLiC Project, there was a weekly topic and the theme changed regularly. Whilst this was stimulating for the children, there was often minimal opportunities to reinforce and expand vocabulary related to the topic and staff felt that there were some topics that could have been extended beyond the week. Topics now last longer than a week on average and themes merge from one into the other so that there is a continuation and extension of vocabulary. There is evidence that a child's vocabulary at age five can predict later academic achievement<sup>67</sup> and so a focus on vocabulary in the early years at a universal level, by providing a rich model with regular repetition, is beneficial for all children regardless of whether or not they have an identified SLCN.

### Ensure that speech, language and communication is a key priority within the setting

After all of the changes made to the environment and the re-introduction of Early Talk Boost as a routine intervention, the Communication Team were keen to ensure that communication stayed as a priority for the setting. To that end, the Communication Team developed a Communication Policy that is displayed in the staff area of the setting and is included in an induction manual for new staff. This addresses one of the recommendations of the Bercow Report: 10 Years On<sup>68</sup> by ensuring there is clarity regarding how the setting supports SLCN.

Posters will remain on display to prompt staff to increase language learning interactions and the Communication Team will continue to champion the importance of communication. Including the introduction of a Communication Policy has ensured the longevity of the project which will become embedded into the culture of the setting, an approach reported to be important for effective change to occur<sup>69</sup>. The Nursery's Senior Leadership Team have released other staff to attend training for Early Talk Boost to ensure that it does not solely rely on the Communication Team members to implement it.

## What were the findings and outcomes of the project?

The greatest success of the Purple Childcare SSLiC Project has been all of the positive changes to the environment to develop it to a communication friendly setting. A qualitative questionnaire was used by the Communication Team to gather feedback from nursery staff regarding the changes to the environment. Responses were collected in a free text box related to the differences observed since re-organising the setting. All responses were positive, and staff made reference to the increased time available to them to interact with children with comments such as, *'I am now able to spend more time with children who are behind with communication'*. Staff also commented on the impact that it had had on them personally with examples such as, *'I feel much more calm and organised'*. Further to this, staff had noticed a change in how they interact with the children with comments such as *'staff's communication is now more effective'*.

The questionnaire also asked staff to consider the impact, if any, the changes had made to children's communication. Again, the responses were overwhelmingly positive with comments regarding vocabulary in particular e.g., *'children are talking more and vocabulary is bigger'* and *'increased vocabulary and staff interaction'*. Staff also recognised that children with English as an Additional Language (EAL) had particularly benefitted from the changes and

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67 Bleeses, D., Makransky, G., Dale, P.S., Højen, A. and Ari, B.A., (2016). Early productive vocabulary predicts academic achievement 10 years later. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 37(6), pp.1461-1476.

68 Bercow (2018) [337644-ICAN-Bercow-Report-WEB.pdf \(bercow10yearson.com\)](#) accessed 5th June 2023

69 Kotter, JP. (2012). *Leading Change*, Harvard Business Review Press, Boston, Mass.

commented ‘children with EAL more willing to speak’. There were also very positive comments specifically related to the implementation of Early Talk Boost.

Finally, staff were asked via the questionnaire to comment on the introduction of the Communication Team in the setting. All those who responded were aware of who to contact should they have concerns about a child’s SLCN within the setting. They had also all used the posters provided by the Communication Team as prompts to use techniques that develop children’s communication skills.

## Key Learning

The SSLiC Project at Purple Childcare has promoted the importance of speech, language and communication for children for a range of purposes. The Communication Team have championed the importance of language and communication and cascaded information to staff members, increasing the awareness of all of those working at the setting about the benefits of language for children’s ability to interact with peers and adults; for their wellbeing; and for their academic achievements. Being able to interact and communicate with peers is important for developing social relationships. A review of the Better Communication Research Programme<sup>70</sup> describes how parents report that for children with a language or communication difficulty, quality of life can be affected. There were increased reports of experiencing social exclusion compared to peers who did not have language or communication difficulties and scores below average for mood and emotions. There is also a wealth of evidence demonstrating the relationship between early speech, language and communication difficulties and later academic achievements. Children

who are reported to have SLCN in the early years are reported to have poorer outcomes at the end of Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 than their typically developing peers<sup>71,72,73</sup>. Public Health England have recently highlighted the importance of upskilling the workforce in early education and childcare settings through developing their knowledge of the impact of SLCN<sup>74</sup> and the SSLiC Project at Purple Childcare has therefore addressed this recommendation.

The enthusiasm of the Communication Team has ensured that communication is a priority in the setting and that this is a consistent message across Purple Childcare Nursery. Alongside this, the Communication Team recognise the value of having a strong leadership team who were supportive throughout the project. This has resulted in all staff being open to change and working together to improve the environment.

There is evidence that it is easier to implement change when staff feel trusted to do so by leadership<sup>75</sup> and this creates a culture of enthusiasm and openness to change<sup>76</sup>.

One of the key learning points was that the Purple Childcare SSLiC Project highlighted the importance of implementing targeted language interventions with the same level of priority that other interventions, such as those for physical difficulties, are delivered. Staff have seen the benefits of the regular provision of the Early Talk Boost intervention and understand why it needs to be delivered consistently in order for children to make progress. This addresses another recommendation of the Bercow report: 10 years On<sup>77</sup>, by ensuring that evidence-based interventions which address delayed language are implemented.

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- 70 Dockrell, J., Lindsay, G., Roulstone, S. and Law, J., 2014. Supporting children with speech, language and communication needs: an overview of the results of the Better Communication Research Programme. *International journal of Language & Communication disorders*, 49(5), pp.543-557.
- 71 Conti-Ramsden, G., Botting, N., Knox, E., & Simkin, Z. (2002). Different school placements following language unit attendance: Which factors affect language outcome? *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*, 37(2), 185-195.
- 72 Dockrell, J., Lindsay, G., & Palikara, O. (2011). Explaining the academic achievement at school leaving for pupils with a history of language impairment: Previous academic achievement and literacy skills. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 27(2), 223-237.
- 73 Durkin, K., Simkin, Z., Knox, E., & Conti-Ramsden, G. (2009). Specific language impairment and school outcomes. II: Educational context, student satisfaction, and post-compulsory progress. *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*, 44(1), 36-55.
- 74 Public Health England (2020). [Best start in speech, language and communication: Guidance to support local commissioners and service leads \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#) accessed 5th June 2023.
- 75 Education Endowment Foundation (2019). [EEF Implementation Guidance Report 2019.pdf \(d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net\)](#) accessed 8th June 2023
- 76 Aarons, G.A. (2006). Transformational and transactional leadership: Association with attitudes toward evidence-based practice. *Psychiatric services*, 57(8), pp.1162-1169.
- 77 Bercow (2018) [337644-ICAN-Bercow-Report-WEB.pdf \(bercow10yearson.com\)](#) accessed 5th June 2023.

Finally, staff have learned about the impact of the environment on communication and children's learning. Ensuring the setting provides a high-quality communicative environment can support children's speech, language and communication development<sup>78</sup>. From simple organisational changes, there has been a noticeable difference in children's communication. Staff have also noticed the impact on themselves and that they have more time to interact with children as the setting is organised and runs well. Moreover, staff feel more relaxed, and this allows increased engagement and interaction with the children, in turn increasing communication opportunities. The challenge now will be to continue to review the environment so that practitioners can continue to make a positive difference to communication for all children at the setting.

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78 Public Health England (2020). [Best Start in Speech, Language and Communication: Supporting evidence](https://publishing.service.gov.uk) ([publishing.service.gov.uk](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)) accessed 8th June 2023

## St. Ursula's E-Act Academy

**Supporting communication through early identification of Speech, Language and Communication Needs and use of signs and symbols to understand the written and spoken word**

### Research Team and Setting

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Dr Ioanna Bakopoulou, SSLiC Programme Lead, School of Education, University of Bristol



## Background

St. Ursula's E-Act Academy is a large, three-form entry primary school, located in Westbury on Trym, North Bristol. The school has a wide catchment area with children travelling from all areas around Bristol to attend. Staff working within the Early Years Foundation Stage at St. Ursula's E-Act Academy had noticed that there were increasing numbers of children entering Reception year with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) including children identified as having special educational needs and disability (SEND). The school uses Talk Boost screening<sup>79</sup> to identify children in Reception classes who require targeted support for SLCN and the number of children requiring intervention had doubled in the last three years, from 11% in 2020/21 to 22% in 2022/23.

Furthermore, the number of children on the SEND register, with difficulties related to Communication and Interaction, entering Reception had tripled from three children in 2020/21 to nine children in 2022/23. The increase in concerns regarding SLCN since the Covid-19 pandemic are reflected in a report published by the Education Endowment Foundation<sup>80</sup> and related educational research<sup>81</sup>. This review reported that over half of schools consulted across the UK had concerns about children's development when compared to previous cohorts of Reception children, with the highest level of concern being for language and communication.

Research has demonstrated that communication skills at age five can be a predictor for later academic success. For example, there is a correlation between children who have language difficulties in the early years performing less well than their typically developing peers at the end of Key Stage 2<sup>82</sup> and Key Stage 4<sup>83,84</sup>. Moreover, there is evidence that the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills is impacted by SLCN, and

79 Speech and Language UK [Talk Boost KS1 \(speechandlanguage.org.uk\)](https://www.speechandlanguage.org.uk) accessed 19th June 2023

80 Tracey et al. (2022) [EEF-School-Starters.pdf \(d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net\)](https://www.eef.org.uk/media/1000/EEF-School-Starters.pdf) accessed 2nd June 2023

81 Bakopoulou, I. (2022). The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on early years transition to school in the UK context. *Education 3-13*. DOI: [10.1080/03004279.2022.2114807](https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2022.2114807)

82 Conti-Ramsden, G., Botting, N., Knox, E., & Simkin, Z. (2002). Different school placements following language unit attendance: Which factors affect language outcome? *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*, 37(2), 185-195.

83 Dockrell, J., Lindsay, G., & Palikara, O. (2011). Explaining the academic achievement at school leaving for pupils with a history of language impairment: Previous academic achievement and literacy skills. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 27(2), 223-237.

84 Durkin, K., Simkin, Z., Knox, E., & Conti-Ramsden, G. (2009). Specific language impairment and school outcomes. II: Educational context, student satisfaction, and post-compulsory progress. *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*, 44(1), 36-55

research, repeatedly, highlights gaps between children with SLCN and their peers in reading, writing and mathematics.<sup>85,86</sup>

The school had also seen an increase in the number of children who spoke English as an additional language (EAL) over the last three years. In Reception, the percentage of children who were registered as EAL in 2020/21 was 2% and this increased to 8% the following year and then 15% by 2022/23. Across the school, numbers of children reported as EAL had increased from 11% in 2020/21 to 14% in 2022/23. As the number of children with SLCN appeared to be increasing year on year, a key area of priority for staff at St. Ursula's was to ensure that screening for SLCN took place early upon entering the Reception year at school. The school already made good use of interventions to support children's language development, but earlier identification would ensure that this was timely, as evidence suggests that intervention for SLCN is effective<sup>87</sup>. Early identification would also enable those children who required additional support from external agencies to access this sooner, again increasing the efficacy of interventions.

Given that the number of children with EAL had increased across the whole school, another priority was to identify a method of supporting language development through a consistent approach. It was hoped that this would also raise awareness of SLCN across all years of the school and ensure that staff were able to support communication with children throughout the school environment by using one consistent method of visual support.

Related to this, staff working in Reception identified that there was a need to consider how the learning environment is organised in order to support the increasing numbers of children with SEND. In particular, the corridor areas outside the classrooms, which were also used as learning spaces were noisy, with children

frequently moving in and out of this area throughout the day. The Communication Team had noticed that children with SEND were frequently distracted when working in this area and it affected attention and listening skills for many children in Reception year. There is evidence that noisy environments can affect children's performance at school<sup>88, 89</sup>. The Communication Team were therefore keen to support children with SEND to feel settled in all areas of the school to enable them to learn effectively.

## What was done?

A Communication Team was set up with key members of staff who worked in the Reception classes. This incorporated support staff as well as one of the Reception class teachers. The SSLiC Self-Assessment School Audit was completed by the Communication Team which identified a number of strengths, particularly in the Identifying and Supporting SLCN domain. Staff felt strongly that they were using evidence-based interventions to support children who are identified as having SLCN and that they were clear about how to seek additional support from outside agencies. Within this domain, identification of SLCN was highlighted as an area of further work that was being developed within the school.

The SSLiC Self-Assessment School Audit also identified that staff within the school were well supported by leadership in undertaking continuing professional development in relation to SLCN and that learning was cascaded throughout the school. SLCN was increasingly becoming understood by all members of staff and was an area of developing work in the school.

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85 Gascoigne, M., and Gros, J. (2017) Talking About a Generation: Current policy, evidence and practice for speech, language and communication, The Communication Trust. <http://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/resources/resources-for-practitioners/talking-about-ageneration/> accessed 3rd June 2023

86 Harrison, L. J., McLeod, S., Berthelsen, D., & Walker, S. (2009). Literacy, numeracy, and learning in school-aged children identified as having speech and language impairment in early childhood. *International Journal of Speech and Language Pathology*, 11(5), 392-403.

87 Law, J., Boyle, J., Harris, F., Harkness, A. and Nye, C. (1998). Screening for speech and language delay: A systematic review of the literature. *Health Technology Assessment*, 2(9), pp. 1-184

88 Shields, B.M., & Dockrell, J.E. (2008). The effects of environmental and classroom noise on the academic attainments of primary school children. *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*, 123, 133-144.

89 Dockrell, J. E., & Shield, B. M. (2006). Acoustical barriers in classrooms: the impact of noise on performance in the classroom. *British Educational Research Journal*, 32, 509-525.

At the start of the SSLiC Project, the Communication Team spent time carrying out observations of the Reception classrooms using the Communication Supporting Classrooms Observation Tool (CSCOT)<sup>90</sup> to profile the language learning environment, the language learning opportunities offered to children, and the use of language learning interaction techniques. The purpose of using the tool for these observations was to identify areas of strength alongside areas that could be further developed to support children with SLCN, EAL and SEND. Findings from the observations highlighted strengths within the Language Learning Interactions dimension of the CSCOT with school staff frequently extending and supporting children's language skills through a range of techniques. However, the observations also highlighted this domain could be improved through the introduction of some additional materials to support children. This overlapped with areas that could be improved in the Language Learning Environment dimension. The following areas were highlighted as areas that could be developed to create a stronger language provision at St. Ursula's:

### Identifying and supporting SLCN in Reception year

As the numbers of children with SLCN, EAL and SEND had increased over the last three years, staff had become aware of the need to identify and support children as soon as they enter into school. Kerry's role as Speech and Language Learning Support Assistant meant that she was responsible for ensuring that the Early Talk Boost<sup>91</sup> screening took place as soon as possible at the beginning of the Autumn Term. It became apparent that her role could be used flexibly, not only directly with children, but also as a co-ordinator role. Within this role, she was able to support teaching staff by liaising with external agencies, such as the Speech and Language Therapy Service. She became the key contact within the school for SLCN and acted quickly to gather information to share with class teachers. She ensured that all children identified

as having a high level of need from screening were referred to Speech and Language Therapy services. With support from the school's SENCo, she produced spreadsheets to manage all of the information to ensure staff were aware of each child's level of need and the interventions they were receiving and from whom. Her knowledge of the children's needs enabled her to deliver appropriate speech and language interventions in the Spring and Summer term as directed by the outcome of the screening process or from information provided from external agencies. This ensured all children identified as having SLCN received timely intervention which was appropriate for their level of need.

### Creating communication supporting environments

The St. Ursula's Communication Team observed the three Reception classrooms at the school and discussed with class teachers areas of strength while highlighting areas that could be developed. The CSCOT provided a good framework for evaluation and staff noticed that, overall, the Language Learning Environment of all three classrooms was good. Every Reception classroom was organised to emphasise space, was well lit and learning areas were clearly defined. These environmental factors have been reported to support language learning in the classroom<sup>92</sup>. The classrooms were well resourced with books and equipment which encouraged language<sup>93,94</sup>, such as small world objects and musical instruments<sup>95</sup>.

An area for development highlighted was creating a space for privacy/quiet time where children could retreat to have down time. This resonated with the Communication Team who identified that this could be particularly beneficial for the children who had been identified as having SEND. It is also widely supported by research that having a quiet area can have a positive impact on children's language and communication through increasing the ability to concentrate on

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90 Dockrell, J.E., Bakopoulou, I., Law, J., Spencer, S., & Lindsay, G. (2012). Communication Supporting Classroom Observation Tool. Freely available from: <https://speechandlanguage.org.uk/talking-point/for-professionals/the-communication-trust/more-resources/classroom-supporting-tool/>.

91 Speech and Language UK (2015). [early-talk-boost-evaluation2015.pdf](https://speechandlanguage.org.uk/early-talk-boost-evaluation2015.pdf) (speechandlanguage.org.uk) accessed 3rd June 2023

92 Roskos, K. and Neuman, S.B. (2001). Environment and its influences for early literacy teaching and learning. *Handbook of early literacy research*, pp.281-292.

93 Dowhower, S.L. and Beagle, K.G.(1998). The print environment in kindergartens: A study of conventional and holistic teachers and their classrooms in three settings. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 37(3), pp.161-190.

94 Montag, J.L., Jones, M.N. and Smith, L.B. (2015). The words children hear: Picture books and the statistics for language learning. *Psychological Science*, 26(9), pp.1489-1496.

95 Smith, M.W. and Dickinson, D.K. (1994). Describing oral language opportunities and environments in Head Start and other preschool classrooms. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 9(3-4), pp.345-366.

processing communicative information<sup>96</sup>. Alongside this, it was noted that, although background noise was managed well within the Reception classrooms, the learning areas within the corridor outside the classrooms were noisy and distracting for children. These areas were next to the toilets and so it was an area of high traffic with noise from hand dryers interrupting learning and conversations.

### To develop a whole-school consistent approach in supporting language through the use of signs and symbols

Another area identified in the CSCOT related to Language Learning Environments was that areas of learning, resources and materials were clearly labelled. However, the Communication Team reflected that this could be further enhanced through using pictures to support the written word<sup>97</sup>. This also overlapped with a review of Language Learning Interactions dimension of the CSCOT. The St. Ursula's Communication Team identified strengths in this area related to staff in Reception classrooms regularly using strategies such as confirming, imitating, commenting and extending children's language. They also noticed staff using open-ended questions and extending vocabulary<sup>98</sup>. However, there was limited use of signs, symbols or props to reinforce language. There were also children within the classrooms with SLCN, EAL and SEND who would benefit from use of key word signing<sup>99</sup>.

## What were the findings and outcomes of the project?

The role of a SLCN co-ordinator was introduced and developed over the academic year. The initial priority of managing early identification of SLCN evolved so

that Kerry, as co-ordinator, could support both children and staff once staff were aware which children needed the highest level of intervention. As the school already provided evidence-based interventions for SLCN by targeted interventions within the school and purchasing specialist level interventions, they were able to quickly signpost children to receive appropriate support either from within school or from external services. St. Ursula's will continue to ensure that each cohort of children entering Reception are quickly screened for SLCN, so that their needs are identified early on, and appropriate intervention can be received through the systems that have been developed this year. This co-ordinated approach address one of the key points from the Bercow Review: 10 years on<sup>100</sup>. The report highlighted how children with SLCN are not being identified accurately. Using a SLCN co-ordinator ensures early identification and appropriate intervention can be delivered. Using a tiered approach to intervention has been recommended as an appropriate use of resources<sup>101</sup>.

In relation to the creation of language learning environments, the corridor areas were adapted to create a quiet, safe space for children with SEND. Hand dryers were removed from the toilets and replaced with paper towels which instantly reduced the noise in the area enabling all children to engage in conversations that were not disrupted. A tent was purchased to create a safe space for children with SEND where they could go for quiet time as required. This meant that while children were in the tent, they were not interrupted by other children moving past and they could engage with adults and peers in a relaxed environment. There is evidence that environmental noise within schools can affect the skills required for communication in children with SEND<sup>102</sup> (such as the

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96 Dockrell, J.E. and Shield, B.M. (2006). Acoustical barriers in classrooms: The impact of noise on performance in the classroom. *British Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), pp.509-525.

97 Detheridge T & Detheridge M. (2002). *Literacy Through Symbols* (2nd edition). London: David Fulton Publishers Ltd

98 Education Endowment Foundation (2018). *Communication and language approaches*. Education Endowment Foundation Early Years Toolkit. London: Education Endowment Foundation. <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/early-years-toolkit/communication-and-language-approaches> accessed 5th June 2023

99 Grove, N. and Walker, M. (1990). *The Makaton Vocabulary: Using manual signs and graphic symbols to develop interpersonal communication*. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication*, 6(1), pp.15-28.

100 Bercow (2018) [337644-ICAN-Bercow-Report-WEB.pdf \(bercow10yearson.com\)](#) accessed 5th June 2023

101 Law J, Reilly, S, Snow, PC. (2013). Child speech, language and communication need re-examined in a public health context: a new direction for the speech and language therapy profession. *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*, (48),486-96.

102 Dockrell, J.E. and Shield, B.M., 2006. Acoustical barriers in classrooms: The impact of noise on performance in the classroom. *British Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), pp.509-525.



ability to track acoustic information<sup>103</sup> and process sentences<sup>104</sup>). Reduction of environmental noise can, therefore, be considered to be important for children with SLCN to be able to develop communication skills.

The Communication Team identified that the increased number of children with SLCN, EAL and SEND would benefit from a whole-school approach to supporting their language and communication skills. Leadership within the school released key members of staff in the early years for training in Makaton<sup>105</sup>, a formal signing and symbol programme that can be used either as a main method of communication or to support and facilitate language learning. Use of this formal system meant that children and staff did not need to rely on a range of informal gestures so that there would be increased opportunities for communication both with adults and peers. As a result, staff trained in Makaton used it throughout the school day with all children, and then supported children to learn key signs so that they could interact with their peers. Research demonstrates the importance of encouraging signing as a method of communication to reduce barriers for participation and facilitating inclusion<sup>106</sup>.

Leadership within the school also released all teachers for training in the use of Widgit<sup>107</sup>. This is a symbol-based system often used to support written language. Through this training, staff became aware of the multiple uses of symbols to support language learning. Many resources have been created within the school that support children such as daily timetables, instructions on worksheets and single symbols worn on lanyards to remind children of classroom rules when required. The same symbols are used throughout the school so as children transition between areas of the school and through the years there is consistency to aid understanding.

The use of signs and symbols as a method of supporting children's speech, language and communication was evaluated through the use of a questionnaire disseminated by the Communication Team to staff throughout the school. Of those who responded, 47% had been trained in using Makaton. While it was clear that this was a strategy that was in its early infancy in the school, respondents who had been trained reported the value in its use. For example, staff commented 'the use of the signs along with the word has helped with understanding' and 'it has become a really useful tool for a pupil with EAL'. There is research evidence to support the use of Makaton as a method of developing communication with English language learners<sup>108</sup>.

Evaluation of the use of Widgit reflected the higher number of staff trained in the approach (94% of those who responded) with 80% of people reporting that it was easy or very easy to use. There were many comments which highlighted the benefits for communication such as 'it has allowed for children to identify, understand and communicate more easily', 'expectations are clearer' and 'increasingly complex instructions being able to be followed'. Comments also explicitly reported the perceived benefits for children with SEND and EAL such as 'Widgit has supported pupils' comprehension, especially SEN, and for a pupil with EAL'.

Finally, an evaluation of children with SLCN was undertaken using the Leuven Scales of Wellbeing and Involvement<sup>109</sup> to monitor children's levels of engagement and wellbeing. Children identified as having SLCN through screening were observed during the Autumn Term by class teachers and, then again, at the beginning of the Summer Term. All of the children made progress in both engagement and wellbeing.

Of the 13 children observed by Reception class

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103 Lasky, E. & Tobin, H. (1973) Linguistic and nonlinguistic competing message effects, *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 6, 243-250.

104 Bradlow, A. R., Krauss, N. & Hayes, E. (2003) Speaking clearly for children with learning disabilities: Sentence perception in noise, *Journal of Speech Language and Hearing Research*, 46(1), 80-97

105 Makaton Home ([makaton.org](http://makaton.org)) accessed 5th June 2023

106 Cologon, K. and Mevawalla, Z. (2018). Increasing inclusion in early childhood: Key Word Sign as a communication partner intervention. *International journal of inclusive education*, 22(8), pp.902-920.

107 [Widgit Software | Widgit Symbols Help Communication](#) accessed 3rd June 2023

108 Mistry, M. and Barnes, D. (2013). The use of Makaton for supporting talk, through play, for pupils who have English as an Additional Language (EAL) in the Foundation Stage. *Education 3-13*, 41(6), pp.603-616.

109 Laevers, F. (2015). Making care and education more effective through wellbeing and involvement. An introduction to Experiential Education. Research Centre for Experiential Education; University of Leuven; Leuven, Belgium.

teachers, the average score for involvement in the Autumn Term was 2.3 (Low involvement – the child is engaged in the activity for some of the time they are observed, but there are moments of non-activity when they stare into space or are distracted by what is going on around them). The repeated observations at the beginning of the Summer Term gave an average score for involvement of 4.1 (High to Extremely High involvement – the child shows continuous and intense activity revealing the greatest involvement. They are concentrated, creative, energetic and persistent throughout nearly all the observed period) demonstrating a very positive improvement in children's involvement. The average score for Wellbeing based on Reception teacher observation in the Autumn Term was 2.2 (Low– a child may appear uncomfortable in their atmosphere and a little bit unhappy). This score increased to 4.2 in the Summer Term (High – children are content with what they are doing and their mood is noticeably happy), again indicating a very positive change at the end of the SSLIC Project.

## Key Learning

Implementation of the SSLIC Programme at St Ursula's E-Act Primary Academy has been challenging for a number of reasons. Firstly, in the Autumn Term there was a high number of supply staff within the school, many of whom were unfamiliar with the setting and included support staff who had not previously worked with children. Understandably, this required the Communication Team to prioritise their efforts in working with new members of staff and explanation of how to support children with SEND and SLCN. As previously discussed, there was a great increase in the numbers of children with SEND, EAL and SLCN entering Reception year when compared to previous cohorts of Reception children. This provided a challenge in relation to how best to support the high numbers of children now requiring additional help which in itself brought about changes which have benefitted the school for future cohorts of children. The Communication Team felt strongly that the

changes had resulted in a more proactive, organised and confident approach to prepare for the next cohort. This approach is in line with Public Health England's guidance for providing a systematic approach to intervention for children with SLCN<sup>110</sup>. As demand for Specialist Speech and Language Therapy services has increased so has the requirement for schools to provide interventions which address SLCN as there is evidence of the effectiveness of this approach<sup>111</sup>.

Finally, a key learning point has been around having a whole-school approach to communication. Comments around the use of Widgit symbols across the school have been overwhelmingly positive with many staff reporting increased confidence in their ability to support children with SLCN. For those who have also been trained in Makaton, comments reflect the desire to implement this as a whole-school approach to aid understanding and increase communicative interactions. Using a consistent method of supporting children's communication skills raises the importance of SLCN throughout their primary school years. Previous research has suggested that a consistent approach is used in schools to reduce the cognitive load for children<sup>112</sup>. This consistent approach now needs to be embedded within the school to be fully effective which is likely to take time and the Communication Team will continue to champion this.

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110 Public Health England (2020). *Best start in speech, language and communication: Guidance to support local commissioners and service leads* (publishing.service.gov.uk) accessed 5th June 2023.

111 Ebbels, S.H., McCartney, E., Slonims, V., Dockrell, J.E. and Norbury, C.F. (2019). Evidence-based pathways to intervention for children with language disorders. *International journal of language & communication disorders*, 54(1), pp.3-19.

112 Greenstock, L., & Pampoulou, E. (2010). Exploring the use of graphic symbols. *Communication Matters*, 24(2), p.32.

## Easton CE Academy

**Improving and increasing opportunities for good quality spoken interaction by creating strong language learning environments**

### Research Team and Setting

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## Background

Easton CE Academy is located in East Bristol. The school has a diverse community with over 85% of children having English as an Additional Language (EAL). Many of the children in the school live in large families in often overcrowded conditions. There is evidence that this can affect children's education<sup>113,114</sup>. Staff at Easton CE Academy felt that, in particular, children's attention and listening skills had been adversely affected as a result of living in overcrowded homes during lockdown periods of the Covid-19 pandemic. There are also a high number of children with Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) and the school hosts a class for children with SLCN and Autistic Spectrum Condition as part of their provision. Teaching staff are aware of the importance of oral language for later academic achievement as there is a correlation between children having language difficulties in the early years and achieving less well at the end of Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 than their typically developing peers<sup>115,116,117</sup>. Therefore, a focus on speech, language and communication has been one of the key priorities in the School Improvement Plan for a number of years.

The SSLiC Self-Assessment School Audit was completed by Clare (Head teacher) and the Reception class teachers. This identified that the school had a number of strengths as a result of the previous work they had carried out to improve speech, language and communication across the school. For example, there is evidence that having a strong, strategic approach to speech, language and communication is effective for language learning<sup>118</sup>. In particular, at Easton CE Academy, there was evidence of a strong language leadership with a culture of promoting oracy across the school. Some staff within the school had also been part of the Voice 21 project<sup>119</sup> (a charity which

113 Lien, H.M., Wu, W.C. and Lin, C.C. (2008). New evidence on the link between housing environment and children's educational attainments. *Journal of Urban Economics*, 64(2), pp.408-421.

114 Goux, D. and Maurin, E. (2005). The effect of overcrowded housing on children's performance at school. *Journal of Public Economics*, 89(5-6), pp.797-819.

115 Conti-Ramsden, G., Botting, N., Knox, E., & Simkin, Z. (2002). Different school placements following language unit attendance: Which factors affect language outcome? *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*, 37(2), 185-195.

116 Dockrell, J., Lindsay, G., & Palikara, O. (2011). Explaining the academic achievement at school leaving for pupils with a history of language impairment: Previous academic achievement and literacy skills. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 27(2), 223-237.

117 Durkin, K., Simkin, Z., Knox, E., & Conti-Ramsden, G. (2009). Specific language impairment and school outcomes. II: Educational context, student satisfaction, and post-compulsory progress. *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*, 44(1), 36-55.

118 Justice, L.M. (2004). Creating language-rich preschool classroom environments. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 36-44

119 [Voice 21 | Oracy | United Kingdom](#) accessed 5th June 2023

aims to transform the learning and life chances of young people through talk) from which the school had already embedded many evidenced-based practices that support the development of strong language and communication skills.

Following completion of the SSLiC Self-Assessment School Audit, the Communication Supporting Classroom Observation Tool (CSCOT)<sup>120</sup> was used to review practice within the school with the aim to further enhance speech, language and communication and profile classroom environments. The Communication Team observed the Reception classrooms to evaluate their strengths and identify areas for development. The observations demonstrated a strength in Language Learning Interactions with staff routinely using a wide range of techniques to encourage oral language, such as adults confirming they had understood what a child had said, commenting on the child's play and extending children's language through scaffolding (providing additional information) or introduction of new vocabulary. However, while there were numerous examples of staff using these techniques within the classroom setting, it was noted that these did not always extend to the outdoor learning areas.

The CSCOT also highlighted that there were other areas of the Reception provision that could be further developed related to the Language Learning Environment. Again, the outside learning area was identified as an area that encouraged physical play for children but did not encourage communication to the same extent. Staff reported that the outside area was very busy with children running, jumping and using scooters but that there were limited conversations taking place, either with peers or adults. There is

evidence that outdoor play can be beneficial for children's wellbeing and development<sup>121</sup>. Research has also indicated that outdoor learning, such as Forest School, can have a positive impact on language and communication through increased opportunities for adult-child directed conversations and extension of vocabulary<sup>122,123</sup>.

On the other hand, an abundance of strengths was identified within the classrooms related to the language learning environment. This included learning areas being clearly defined and labelled with a range of displays which encouraged conversations. There is evidence that having clearly defined spaces can facilitate language learning<sup>124</sup>. There were also an adequate supply of books including fiction and non-fiction books related to specific topics or areas of interest, which research indicates is a significant element of a strong language environment<sup>125</sup>. Completing the CSCOT sparked a discussion amongst staff related to the area assigned to be the book area which also doubled as a quiet space. It was identified that children did not use this area much during the day and this was a potential area for improvement as there were no other quiet spaces which enabled children to take time out. Environmental noise from within the classroom has been reported to affect children's abilities to process information<sup>126,127</sup>.

Following the completion of the SSLiC Self-Assessment Audit and the CSCOT, Easton E-Act Academy were motivated to make changes across the Reception classes that could be of benefit to all children's speech, language and communication development. There has been a call for education settings to provide a systematic approach to supporting SLCN<sup>128</sup> in

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- 120 Dockrell, J.E., Bakopoulou, I., Law, J., Spencer, S., & Lindsay, G. (2012). Communication Supporting Classroom Observation Tool. Freely available from: <https://speechandlanguage.org.uk/talking-point/for-professionals/the-communication-trust/more-resources/classroom-supporting-tool/>. Accessed 5th June 2023
- 121 Gill, T. (2014). The benefits of children's engagement with nature: A systematic literature review. *Children Youth and Environments*, 24(2), pp.10-34.
- 122 O'Brien, L. and Murray, R. (2007). Forest School and its impacts on young children: Case studies in Britain. *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening*, 6(4), pp.249-265.
- 123 Waite, S. and Davis, B. (2007). The contribution of free play and structured activities in Forest School1 to learning beyond cognition. *Learning beyond cognition*, p.257.
- 124 Roskos, K. and Neuman, S.B. (2001). Environment and its influences for early literacy teaching and learning. *Handbook of early literacy research*, pp.281-292.
- 125 Dowhower, S.L. and Beagle, K.G. (1998). The print environment in kindergartens: A study of conventional and holistic teachers and their classrooms in three settings. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 37(3), pp.161-190.
- 126 Dockrell, J.E. and Shield, B.M. (2006). Acoustical barriers in classrooms: The impact of noise on performance in the classroom. *British Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), pp.509-525.
- 127 Lasky, E. & Tobin, H. (1973) Linguistic and nonlinguistic competing message effects, *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 6, 243-250
- 128 Public Health England (2020). Best start in speech, language and communication: Guidance to support local commissioners and service leads ([publishing.service.gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/434443/publicing.service.gov.uk)) accessed 5th June 2023

which the importance of universal provision has been reported<sup>129</sup>. It was also important to staff that the changes could be measured to demonstrate their effectiveness. The Education Endowment Foundation recommends ensuring that there are methods to capture the desired changes in practices when implementing new evidence-based approaches<sup>130</sup>. Therefore, these were considered an integral part of the process.

## What was done?

A Communication Team was developed with representation from the Senior Leadership Team and was led by the Reception class teachers. Creating a Communication Team is beneficial in developing a philosophy of language learning within schools<sup>131</sup> and ensures that there is a clear vision for how change can be delivered<sup>132</sup>. Staff were keen to implement small changes that could impact upon children's communication skills regardless of whether or not they were identified with SLCN. As there were so many strengths within the school, it was agreed that focussing on altering the Language Learning Environment would be the best way of making demonstratable change.

### Introducing a quiet space for children to use within and outside the Reception classrooms

Within each of the Reception classrooms, there was a book area that was also intended to be used as a quiet area for children. Reception class teachers reflected that, within these areas, the walls were packed with busy displays and visual information. There was a wide range of books available for children, but class teachers had noticed that children did not spend long in the areas and were often not using the areas for reading books.

Reception class teachers spent time discussing with children in their classrooms about the book areas in order to explore what a reading area and a quiet area meant to the children. As many of the children lived in large families with limited space, it was anticipated that time at home was infrequently quiet. Therefore, time was spent exploring vocabulary related to the terms "quiet" and "calm" to explain to the children what this meant and how it can be demonstrated in the school and classroom setting.

In addition, Reception class teachers reviewed the displays within the book area/quiet area and reflected on how these could be less visually stimulating to encourage a calm environment. Apart from making changes to the areas within the classroom environment, teaching staff explored further the use of the outdoor area, which although busy and children were physically active, staff felt that was ample space to also allow for an area which could be dedicated as a quiet space. Materials were ordered for both inside and outside and the quiet areas were developed over the Spring term.

## What were the findings and outcomes of the project?

The primary outcome of the Easton SSLiC Project is the successful development of an area within each Reception classroom which is dedicated to being a quiet space. Alongside this, there is also an area in the outdoor learning area which has been zoned off as a quiet area. Both of these areas have been designed to increase children's language and communication skills following evidence from research which indicates environmental noise in the classroom can affect children's ability to develop the skills required for communication<sup>133</sup>.

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129 Law J, Reilly, S, Snow, PC. (2013). Child speech, language and communication need re-examined in a public health context: a new direction for the speech and language therapy profession. *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*, (48),486–96.

130 Education Endowment Foundation (2019) *Putting Evidence to Work - A School's Guide to Implementation* | EEF ([educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk](https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk)) accessed 5th June 2023.

131 Justice, L.M. (2004). Creating language-rich preschool classroom environments. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 36–44.

132 Kotter, JP. (2012). *Leading Change*, Harvard Business Review Press, Boston, Mass.

133 Dockrell, J.E. and Shield, B.M. (2006). Acoustical barriers in classrooms: The impact of noise on performance in the classroom. *British Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), pp.509-525.

The quiet areas have been evaluated using a quantitative tally chart and the Leuven Scales of Engagement and Wellbeing<sup>134</sup>. Prior to the indoor quiet areas being introduced Reception class teachers spent 10 minutes observing the book area to review the number of children using the area and evaluating how they were using that time. This evaluation was repeated again once the quiet areas had been introduced and were a familiar part within the setting.

Based on staff observations, children spent on average 1.9 minutes in the reading area for the first observation. During the repeat observations, children were observed to spend five minutes in the area after the changes were made. The longest time spent in the area by any one child was two minutes for the first observation and then 10 minutes once the changes had been made. There was also an increase in the number of children using the area with 10 children across the two classrooms using the area at first and this increased to 16 children after the changes.

The Leuven Scales of Involvement and Wellbeing were also used to determine children's level of engagement and wellbeing when they were accessing the area. Prior to the changes, children's wellbeing was rated as fairly high and there were no changes noticed in this area after changes. However, ratings of children's level of involvement did change going from an average score of 2 (Low involvement – the child is engaged in the activity for some of the time they are observed, but there are moments of non-activity when they stare into space, or are distracted by what is going on around them) to 4.6 at the repeat observation (High to Extremely High involvement – the child shows continuous and intense activity revealing the greatest involvement. They are concentrated, creative, energetic and persistent throughout nearly all the observed period) suggesting a significantly positive change in levels of engagement.

Staff were also asked to reflect upon the impact of the introduction of the quiet area inside the classroom through a questionnaire. The quantitative findings

detailed above were echoed in the qualitative responses of the questionnaire. Several themes emerged from a free text box asking staff what difference the introduction of the quiet areas had meant for children. Staff reported that they had observed an increase in the number of children using the area. Staff also commented on the language learning environment beforehand and how this possibly affected the child's involvement with comments such as 'the area was often noisy and chaotic' and 'children mainly used it to jump onto or over the sofa'. After the changes, staff reported that the purpose of the quiet area had altered commenting 'it encourages children to sit and linger and talk and look at books' and 'they find it as a calm and cosy space to do other activities like playing mums and babies or do some quiet building'.

## Key Learning

The Easton CE Academy SSLiC Project was affected by changes to staff in Reception classes in the Winter term. However, as speech, language and communication is a key priority within the school, staff were keen to continue with the project and make changes to the language learning environment to enhance the provision at a universal level. This demonstrates the benefit of language and communication being considered to be of high importance for staff as they understand the relationship between language and academic achievement<sup>135,136,137</sup>.

Staff were surprised that small changes to the language learning environment could bring about such changes to children's behaviour and engagement in activities. Creating a quiet area within each of the Reception classrooms has brought about an increase in numbers of children using the area and the time spent in meaningful activity.

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134 Laevers, F. (2015). Making care and education more effective through wellbeing and involvement. An introduction to Experiential Education. Research Centre for Experiential Education; University of Leuven: Leuven, Belgium.

135 Conti-Ramsden, G., Botting, N., Knox, E., & Simkin, Z. (2002). Different school placements following language unit attendance: Which factors affect language outcome? *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*, 37(2), 185-195.

136 Dockrell, J., Lindsay, G., & Palikara, O. (2011). Explaining the academic achievement at school leaving for pupils with a history of language impairment: Previous academic achievement and literacy skills. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 27(2), 223-237.

137 Durkin, K., Simkin, Z., Knox, E., & Conti-Ramsden, G. (2009). Specific language impairment and school outcomes. II: Educational context, student satisfaction, and post-compulsory progress. *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*, 44(1), 36-55.

Whilst they have not measured the impact of introducing a quiet area outside, teaching staff are now confident that quiet areas are important for communication and will continue to talk about the purpose of these areas with children. Reducing visual stimulus in the area has encouraged communication and staff were surprised by this as they had worked hard to create interactive visual displays throughout the classroom. The importance of quiet areas within learning environments has been highlighted in research with evidence suggesting that it can aid the processing skills required for language development<sup>138, 139</sup>.

Another important learning point was the benefit of co-producing the quiet areas with the children in the Reception classrooms. Through introduction of the concepts of “quiet” and “calm” and exploring relevant vocabulary and what that meant to children, the areas were used in a purposeful way increasing communicative interactions. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child ensures that children’s views are respected and acknowledged<sup>140</sup>. Encouraging children to think critically by developing their own ideas, sharing ideas and making links between them is also a recommendation within the Early Years Foundation Phase<sup>141</sup>. Supporting materials from the Voice 21 project which staff were already familiar with were used to structure discussions and explore vocabulary.

Including measures to evaluate the changes made at the outset of the Easton CE Academy SSLiC Project has been valuable in developing staff’s awareness of these changes. Collecting feedback from staff who had been involved in the changes has encouraged reflective practice, allowing practitioners to critically evaluate their own responses thereby increasing self-awareness<sup>142</sup>. This has encouraged staff to continue to support the changes made to the Language Learning Environment. Moreover, using the Leuven Scales of Wellbeing and Involvement, a tool which was already familiar to staff, allowed them to critically evaluate the impact of the

changes to the children<sup>143</sup>. This has empowered Easton CE Academy to continue to support the changes allowing for longevity of the SSLiC Project.

Finally, the SSLiC Project at Easton CE Academy has demonstrated the benefits of making small changes to Language Learning Environments which can have a beneficial impact on children’s communication. The school will continue to use these quiet areas for years to come and have increased their strength in universal provision to enhance speech, language and communication skills.

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138 Dockrell, J.E. and Shield, B.M.(2006). Acoustical barriers in classrooms: The impact of noise on performance in the classroom. *British Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), pp.509-525.

139 Lasky, E. & Tobin, H. (1973) Linguistic and nonlinguistic competing message effects. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 6, 243-250

140 [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child - UNICEF UK](#) accessed 5th June 2023

141 Department for Education (2021) [Development Matters - Non-statutory curriculum guidance for the early years foundation stage \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#) accessed 5th June 2023

142 Finlay, L. (2008). Reflecting on ‘Reflective practice’ *Practice-based Professional Learning Centre*. 1 (1) pp.1-19

143 Laevers F (2011) *Experiential education: Making care and education more effective through well-being and involvement*. Available at: <http://www.child-encyclopedia.com/Pages/PDF/LaeversANGxp1.pdf> accessed 5th June 2023





## St Nicholas of Tolentine Catholic Primary School

**Promoting oral language across the school and supporting language learning interactions in the EYFS and Year 1 class**

### Research Team and Setting

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## Background

St Nicholas of Tolentine is a Catholic school in the St Jude's area of central Bristol. The school has a high number of children with English as an Additional Language (EAL), representing 51.9% of the school population. The school's main social demographic is disadvantaged with 55.7% of children eligible for free school meals, and 24.8% of children with persistent absence. Research indicates that those from disadvantaged backgrounds more frequently experience language difficulties<sup>144</sup>. Research also points to an increased likelihood in children underachieving in their education when EAL presents with social deprivation<sup>145</sup>. In addition, school staff have been aware of an increase in the number of children with special educational needs and disability (SEND) which has increased from 19% to 24.4% this academic year, with 37.5% of these children presenting with Communication and Interaction as their primary need.

Given the large number of children at school identified with Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) or as having low language levels, a priority area of focus for the St Nicholas of Tolentine SSLiC Project was to promote high quality teaching to develop the language and communication skills of all children through the development of strong language learning environments, which research<sup>146,147</sup> suggests can prepare children for the more challenging demands placed on oracy as they proceed through school, and can also reduce the numbers of children identified as experiencing SLCN. Promoting high-quality language teaching is also included in the School Improvement Plan, with a particular focus on developing children's vocabulary.

A Communication Team was established with representation across the staff team including the Deputy Headteacher and SENDCo (Natalie), the EYFS and Year 1 class teacher (Charlotte), and a Learning Support Assistant supporting and delivering

144 Law, J., Lindsay, G., Peacey, P., Gascoigne M., Soloff, N., Radford, J., Band, S., and Fitzgerald, L. (2000). Provision for children's speech and language needs in England and Wales: facilitating communication between education and health services. DfES research report 23.

145 Strand, S., Malmberg, L. and Hall, J., (2015). English as an Additional Language (EAL) and educational achievement in England: An analysis of the National Pupil Database.

146 Dockrell, J.E., Lindsay, G., Roulstone, S., & Law, J. (2014). Supporting children with speech, language and communication needs: An overview of the results of the Better Communication Research Programme. *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*, 49, 43-57.

147 Dockrell, J.E., Bakopoulou, I., Law, J., Spencer, S., & Lindsay, G. (2015). Capturing communication supporting classrooms: The development of a tool and feasibility study. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 31(3), 271-286.

interventions to children with SEND (Serena). The Communication Team initially carried out the SSLiC Self-Assessment School Audit which revealed that most domains were being developed already with a range of existing good practice within the school. However, there was an acknowledgment that, although staff have received various professional development and learning opportunities, the school priority on language development has not been clearly articulated, resulting in inconsistent impact.

There is substantial evidence<sup>148</sup> that shows the importance of supporting professional development through a balanced approach that encompasses four key areas that relate to building knowledge, motivating educators, developing teaching techniques and embedding practice. The St Nicholas of Tolentine Communication Team reflected that these areas were missing from past professional development activities. In addition, it was felt that the school did not have a clear whole school philosophy of language learning which will influence the choices school staff make in structuring the physical environment of the classroom, designing language learning opportunities and interacting with children, a factor that has been highlighted in educational early years research<sup>149</sup>. Finally, following completion of the Communication Supporting Classrooms Observation Tool (CSCOT)<sup>150</sup> in the EYFS and Year 1 classroom, it was acknowledged that staff would benefit from additional support in creating communication supporting classrooms by providing language learning opportunities and ensuring a consistent use of language learning interaction techniques by all members of staff. There is strong evidence that children having opportunities to engage in structured conversations with adults supports their language learning<sup>151,152</sup>. Further to this, the research

suggests that how adults talk and respond to children can enhance their language<sup>153,154</sup>. By maximizing the quality of their language interactions, adults can make a significant difference in language learning<sup>155</sup>.

## What was done?

### Promoting the importance of oral language

The St Nicholas of Tolentine Communication Team's first priority was to introduce the SSLiC Programme to the whole staff team. In doing this, they also presented the results from the classroom observations using the CSCOT findings and explored together the range of language learning interaction techniques staff could use alongside the research evidence of their impact. Natalie discussed these techniques in relation to the School Improvement Plan of supporting children in understanding and using new vocabulary through modelling and extending to allow school staff to gain a broader understanding of the importance of oral language. In this way, the Communication Team took a principled approach to creating a clear vision for change for the whole school community. Research recognises benefits of teams taking time to communicate and engage in a shared vision<sup>156</sup> noting that this can support effective change.

### Supporting school staff's professional development in creating communication supporting classrooms

The Communication Team focused the school's SSLiC Project on the EYFS and Year 1 class. All members of that teaching team agreed to practise their use of language learning interaction techniques across the day with the children. The particular language learning interaction techniques staff were working on were

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148 Education Endowment Foundation (2023). Guide to Effective Professional Development in the Early Years.

149 Justice, L. (2004). Creating Language-Rich Preschool Classroom Environments. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 37(2), 36-44.

150 Dockrell, J.E., Bakopoulou, I., Law, J., Spencer, S., & Lindsay, G. (2012). Communication Supporting Classroom Observation Tool. Freely available from: <https://speechandlanguage.org.uk/talking-point/for-professionals/the-communication-trust/more-resources/classroom-supporting-tool/>

151 Best, W., Melvin, D., & Williams, S. (1993). The effectiveness of communication groups in day nurseries. *European Journal of Disordered Communication*, 28, 187-212.

152 Bickford-Smith, A., Wijayatilake, L., & Woods, G. (2005). Evaluating the Effectiveness of an Early Years Language Intervention. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 21(3), 161-173.

153 Hoff, E. (2003). The specificity of environmental influence: Socioeconomic status affects early vocabulary development via maternal speech. *Child Development*, 74, 1368-1378.

154 Desforges, C., & Abouchar, A. (2003). The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment: a literature review. DfES, Nottingham

155 Chapman, R. S. (2000). Children's language learning: An interactionist perspective. *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines*, 41(1), 33-54

156 Justice, L. (2004). Creating language-rich preschool classroom environments. *Teaching Exceptional Children* 37(4): 36-44.

then displayed in the classroom as a reminder for all staff to see. To support staff in practising the use of different language learning interaction techniques, Charlotte and Natalie arranged weekly sessions across the Autumn and Spring Terms to model techniques in interactions with the children whilst support staff had time to observe. The support staff were then given an opportunity to practise these language learning interaction techniques themselves over the week before setting new targets in the following sessions. During these sessions, staff engaged in reflective conversations with a focus on positive and constructive peer feedback.

## What are the findings and outcomes of the project?

The main outcome of the St Nicholas of Tolentine SSLiC Project is strong evidence of all school staff recognising the importance of and sharing the same vision for the development of children's language development. The project allowed for the Communication Team to present a clear philosophy on supporting language to the whole school, raising everyone's awareness that every adult-child interaction matters. Another outcome of the focus on spoken language in the EYFS and Year 1 class has been an increased awareness amongst school staff of typical developmental milestones in language and communication, which has resulted in an increase to the referrals to the Speech and Language Therapy Service.

In order to evaluate the SSLiC Project two main approaches were taken:

### A) Using the CSCOT to profile the classroom environment before and after the SSLiC Project

At the end of the SSLiC Project, the Communication Team conducted repeat observations using the CSCOT to mark any improvements from the original observations conducted at the start of the project. An analysis of the CSCOT demonstrated all staff in

the EYFS and Year 1 class were using an increased range of LLIs. Commenting, modelling new words and imitating, as had the use of open questioning had increased significantly. Overall LLIs had increased significantly from 18 observed LLIs in the initial observation to 81 observed LLIs in the follow up observation. Research highlights that adults taking opportunity to offer a range of linguistic forms and sentence structures through commenting, extending and scripting can support children in using more complex language<sup>157,158,159</sup>. Raised awareness and practice has also led to an increase in the language learning opportunities for children to engage in structured conversations with all adults during indoor and outdoor activities. The school's Senior Leadership Team also reported back that the recent school improvement plan visit noted that they had observed "...quality interactions in groups observed in EYFS/ year 1".

### B) Qualitative feedback through staff questionnaire

Finally, school staff in EYFS and Year 1 were asked to complete a questionnaire reflecting on the SSLiC Project as well as their professional development and about their levels of confidence in using language learning interaction techniques. The overwhelming majority of the school staff responded positively to this question, talking about the programme having had a great impact on their professional development. School staff reported they were using a range of LLI techniques (in particular, repeating; extending with words or modelling in a sentence; commenting on what the child is doing and asking a question about what they are doing). Finally, support staff reported an increased confidence in their interactions with children and their perceived ability to support language, with some members of staff reporting they wanted to continue developing skills in this area further.

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157 Theakston, A., Ibbotson, P., Freudenthal, D., Lieven, E. and Tomasello, M. (2015). Productivity of noun slots in verb frames. *Cognitive Science*, 39 (6), 1,369–95.

158 Dockrell, J., Bakopoulou, I., Law, J., Spencer, S., & Lindsay, G. (2015). Capturing communication supporting classrooms: The development of a tool and feasibility study. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 31(3), 1-16.

159 Wasik B. and Bond, M. (2001). Beyond the pages of a book: Interactive book reading and language development in preschool classrooms. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 93(2), 243-50.

## Key learning

The St Nicholas of Tolentine SSLiC Project has demonstrated the importance of adopting a vision based on a shared philosophy of language development and the role of the adult in supporting language learning. Adopting such a systematic approach which could be embedded in everyday classroom practice is key when the aim is to effect whole-school changes and support staff's professional development. Underpinning the project has been the process of using a robust and repeatable audit and observation tool as a means of professional development with a focus on regular opportunities to provide constructive peer feedback to identify areas for personal and school development and address these in everyday teaching practice. The importance of ongoing reflective professional conversations was particularly highlighted in the St Nicholas of Tolentine SSLiC Project and widely acknowledged in educational guidance<sup>160</sup>.

Most importantly, the St Nicholas of Tolentine SSLiC Project highlighted that, when it comes to implementation, it is a safer bet for educational settings to select a small number of priorities than creating a lengthy list of strategies and projects that become hard to manage and unclear for school staff, a suggestion that has been demonstrated widely in research and educational policy<sup>161</sup>. In this sense, it is essential to ensure both that professional development aligns with the setting's specific needs and priorities and that is supported by leadership teams. The challenge now for school staff at St Nicholas of Tolentine would be to maintain these changes and sustain the improvements over time.

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<sup>160</sup> Education Endowment Foundation (2023). *Guide to Effective Professional Development in the Early Years*.

<sup>161</sup> Education Endowment Foundation (2019). *Putting Evidence to Work: A School's Guide to Implementation Guidance Report*.

## St Joseph's Catholic Primary School

### Developing teaching assistants' use of language learning interactions through peer mentoring

#### Research Team And Setting

Jo Garnier, EYFS teacher, SENDCo and Assistant Head, St Joseph's RC Primary School

Helen Grainger, Lead for Literacy, St Joseph's RC Primary School

Lidia La Porta, EYFS Teaching Assistant, St Joseph's RC Primary School

Leah Stephens, SSLiC Facilitator, School of Education, University of Bristol

Dr Ioanna Bakopoulou, SSLiC Programme Lead, School of Education, University of Bristol



## Background Information

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School is a one-form entry Catholic primary school in the Fishponds area of Bristol which has 198 children on role. The school has a high number of children with English as an Additional Language (EAL) (33%) and this is reported to be increasing in the early years with more children entering school with no or very little English. The school also has 11% of pupils on pupil premium, and 13% of pupils with special educational needs and disability (SEND).

A Communication Team was established with representation across the staff team including Jo (Assistant Head, EYFS teacher, SENDCo), Helen (Lead for Literacy) and Lidia (EYFS Teaching Assistant).

The Communication Team noted the school had a strong philosophy of oral language demonstrated through their school website and included within the School Development Plan. The Communication Team were also very aware of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on children's language attainment noting more children were entering school in Reception with lower language levels. The increase in concerns regarding speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) since the Covid-19 pandemic are also reflected in recent research<sup>162,163</sup>. Therefore, staff at St Joseph's Catholic Primary School were motivated to develop the language skills of the children and were aware that supporting those interacting with the children throughout the day including TAs and parents/carers would positively impact the children's language development. The correlation between quality interactions between adults and children and language development is well supported in research<sup>164</sup>, indicating that frequent and well-tuned interactions can positively impact children's language development.

162 Tracey et al. (2022) [EEF-School-Starters.pdf \(d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net\)](#) accessed 2nd June 2023.

163 Bakopoulou, I. (2022). The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on early years transition to school in the UK context. *Education* 3-13, DOI: [10.1080/03004279.2022.2114807](#)

164 Chapman, R. S. (2000). Children's language learning: An interactionist perspective. *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines*, 41(1), 33-54

## What was done?

The Communication Team completed the SSLiC Self-Assessment School Audit which highlighted strengths in the communication supporting environments area, in particular in Reception and Year 1. They also noted that they had many well-developed aspects in the staff professional development area of the Audit including an understanding that supporting SLCN is everyone's responsibility. A priority of the Communication Team was to develop oral language across the school by establishing effective language learning interactions with all children. Research highlights that adults taking opportunity in interactions to maximise language input by offering varied sentence structures and more complex language can support children in language learning<sup>165, 166, 167, 168, 169</sup>.

The Communication Team identified that teachers had received clearer training and more effective mentoring of their development of skills through ongoing professional development and interactions with those supporting SLCN. However, the Communication Team acknowledged that there had not been any recent or specific training for teaching assistants (TAs) in developing their ability to support language. Research highlights that many educational professionals may feel they do not have the necessary skills and confidence to support children's language skills<sup>170</sup>. As well as this, the Communication Team acknowledged TAs have considerable and often the most direct opportunities to interact with children and often had responsibility to work individually and support those children with SLCN. The Communication Team felt

that supporting these interactions to ensure they can enhance language was key.

When considering what this training should look like, research has highlighted the benefits of moving away from professional development focusing on courses and workshop events and towards more individual-focused, school- and practitioner-led approaches<sup>171,172</sup>. It was acknowledged that approaches that make use of observational learning<sup>173</sup> and feedback<sup>174</sup> can empower practitioners in developing their interactions with children to support children's oral language. With this research in mind, the Communication Team identified that developing the TAs' use of language learning interactions (LLIs) across the term through self-reflection and encouraging TAs to engage with peer observations and feedback would allow them to identify and use different LLI techniques in their interactions with children.

Initially, it was vital that the Communication Team shared the rationale, aims and plan for the project with teachers across the school to ensure teachers understood and supported the SSLiC Project, ensuring that TAs would have sufficient time to carry out observations and teachers would appreciate and value the LLI techniques TAs were using. Sharing whole-school projects and having commitment across the school is vital to ensure changes can be embedded<sup>175</sup>.

From there, the Communication Team introduced the SSLiC Project to the TAs and 6 out of 8 TAs in the school volunteered to be involved. The first step was for the TAs to gain awareness of the LLI techniques that could be used to support and develop language.

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165 Theakston, A., Ibbotson, P., Freudenthal, D., Lieven, E. and Tomasello, M. (2015). Productivity of noun slots in verb frames., *Cognitive Science*, 39 (6), 369–95.

166 Dockrell, J.E., Bakopoulou, I., Law, J., Spencer, S., & Lindsay, G. (2015). Capturing communication supporting classrooms: The development of a tool and feasibility study. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 31(3), 1-16.

167 Dockrell J.E., Stuart, M. and King, D. (2010). Supporting early oral language skills for English language learners in inner city preschool provision. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 80( 4), 497-515.

168 Saxton, M., Backley, P., & Gallawa, C. (2005). Negative input for grammatical errors: effects after a lag of 12 weeks. *Journal of Child Language*, 32(3), 643-72.

169 Wasik, B.A., & Bond, M.A. (2001). Beyond the pages of a book: Interactive book reading and language development in preschool classrooms. *Journal of Educational Psychology*. 93(2), 243-50.

170 Dockrell, J.E., & Hurry, J. (2018). The identification of speech and language problems in elementary school: Diagnosis and co-occurring needs. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 81, 52-64

171 Knight, P., & Trowler, P. (2001). *Departmental leadership in higher education*. McGraw-Hill Education, UK

172 Harland, J., & Kinder, K. (1997). Teachers' continuing professional development: Framing a model of outcomes. *British Journal of In-Service Education*, 23(1), 71-84

173 Myers, D.M., Simonsen, B., & Sugai, G. (2011). Increasing teachers' use of praise with a response-to-intervention approach. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 34(1), 35-59

174 Rathel, J. M., Drasgow, E., & Christle, C. C. (2008). Effects of supervisor performance feedback on increasing preservice teachers' positive communication behaviors with students with emotional and behavioral disorders. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 16(2), 67-77.

175 Kotter, JP. (2012). *Leading Change*. Boston, Mass: Harvard Business Review Press

The 20 LLIs included in the Communication Supporting Classrooms Observation Tool (CSCOT)<sup>176</sup> were shared with the TAs. TAs had time to look through these together with the Communication Team, discuss and reflect on those they are using and those they are not using as consistently or at all. By the end of the first session, all 6 TAs identified one LLI technique they would practise in their interactions with children. TAs were then paired and arranged a time to observe one another interacting with a child or group of children. The TAs were asked to use the model of peer coaching<sup>177</sup>, this model involves professional colleagues working together to share ideas, model, practise and feedback to build on new skills<sup>178</sup>. Research has suggested peer coaching can be an effective way of altering teaching practice<sup>179</sup> and there is evidence to support effective professional development whereby staff develop their skills through revisiting, feedback and planning<sup>180</sup>. After each observation, TAs were able to identify whether they wanted to continue to focus on the same LLI technique or identify a different one. TAs were asked to record the LLIs they were practising each time they met, and to each observe each other at least 3 times over the Spring Term (January-March). Following three observations, the Communication Team met with the TAs to discuss progress and gain feedback.

## What were the findings of the project?

One of the key findings of the St Joseph's SSLiC Project was that TAs found the process useful and reflected that observing others had enhanced their own interactions. The Communication Team collected feedback about the process via a staff questionnaire aimed to measure how effective TAs found the process in developing their use of language learning interaction techniques. TAs reported valuing this way of learning

with one TA saying it was a "good opportunity to be reminded of strategies, raise awareness of how to use them to teach more effectively" and another commenting that it led to "increased confidence". There was acknowledgement from one TA that being observed can be uncomfortable although this TA also appreciated the value of being involved and wanted to remain part of the process.

TAs were asked in their evaluation to identify a technique they had developed and reported on using more advanced LLI techniques such as use of open questioning, pacing, encouraging new words, commenting and pausing. The TAs were also asked in their evaluation to reflect on opportunities to use these techniques, and all acknowledged that they were using them in their interactions with children daily across a number of activities including: reading, maths, small group work, free play, specific interventions.

The evaluations also allowed staff to reflect on the impact of increased using of language learning interaction techniques on the children. TAs reflected that pacing allowed the children time to respond and pausing encouraged children to listen to their peers. These findings support research that suggests the importance of a tuned in communication partner in supporting language development<sup>181</sup>. They also reflected that extending language allowed children to use new vocabulary, which research highlights by demonstrating that language development can be supported by adults using varied linguistic forms and more complex sentence structures<sup>182,183</sup>.

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176 Dockrell, J.E., Bakopoulou, I., Law, J., Spencer, S., & Lindsay, G. (2012). Communication Supporting Classroom Observation Tool. Freely available from: [https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/media/93866/tct\\_bcrp\\_csc\\_final.pdf](https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/media/93866/tct_bcrp_csc_final.pdf)

177 Showers, B. and Joyce, B. (1996). The evolution of peer coaching. *Educational leadership*, 53, pp.12-16.

178 Arslan, F.Y., Ilin, G.: Effects of peer coaching for the classroom management skills of teachers. *J. Theory Pract. Educ.* 9(1), 43–59 (2013)

179 Britton, L.R. and Anderson, K.A., 2010. Peer coaching and pre-service teachers: Examining an underutilised concept. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26(2), pp.306-314.

180 Education Endowment Foundation (2023). *Guide to Effective Professional Development in the Early Years*.

181 Chapman, R. S. (2000). Children's language learning: An interactionist perspective. *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines*, 41(1), 33-54

182 Hoff, E. (2003). The specificity of environmental influence: Socioeconomic status affects early vocabulary development via maternal speech. *Child Development*, 74, 1368-1378.

183 Dockrell, J.E., Stuart, M., & King, D. (2010). Supporting early oral language skills for English language learners in inner city preschool provision. *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 80, 4, 497-515.

## Key learning

One of the key learning points arising from St Joseph's SSLiC Project was the value of practitioners working with others to support and develop skills. The Communication Team reflected that by allowing TAs opportunities to consider techniques that support language and engage in reflective conversations with others at their level, they were able to have a significant impact on interactions with children which they believe would support and enhance learning across the day. They also noted that this shared practice allowed TAs to grow in confidence with regards to the skills they are using, acknowledging that these skills were best practice and valuable for children's language learning. Finally, the Communication Team noted that creating systems of supporting by introducing a peer mentoring system was a very positive way to identify existing strengths and share the skills TAs have in their interactions with children. Ultimately, this gave TAs the opportunity to implement what they have learned and allowed opportunities for collaboration based on reflection<sup>184</sup>. The challenge now will be to continue using these systems of support and sustain the improvements over time.

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184 Joyce, B., & Showers, B. (2002). *Student achievement through staff development* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition). Alexandria, VA: ASCD.



## Woodlands Academy

### Profiling classroom environments and increasing opportunities for language learning within the classroom

#### Research Team and Setting

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Katherine Brockett, Key Stage 1 Lead and Year 2 teacher, Woodlands Academy

Hannah Williams, Nursery teacher, Woodlands Academy

Leah Stephens, SSLiC Facilitator, School of Education, University of Bristol

Dr Ioanna Bakopoulou, SSLiC Programme Lead, School of Education, University of Bristol



## Background

Woodlands Academy is a single form entry primary school with a nursery provision. The school is in the Stockwood area of South Bristol and is part of the Waycroft Multi Academy Trust. In the academic year 2022-2023, the school had 160 pupils on roll. The school is in an area of high deprivation with 46.8% of children on pupil premium, a factor often linked in research with poorer language skills<sup>185,186</sup>. The school also has a diverse community and has 17.7% of children with English as an Additional Language (EAL). The school has 13.3% of children with identified special educational needs and disability (SEND).

A Communication Team was set up with representation across the school including staff from the Early Years Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2 and SENDCo. The Communication Team recognised significant numbers of children are coming into school with low language levels on entry. Alongside this, school staff had noted that the Covid-19 pandemic had had a significant impact on children's language levels with a higher level of children with Speech, Language and Communication Needs in the Early Years Foundation Stage, a concern that has also been highlighted in recent national research<sup>187,188</sup>.

The Woodlands Academy School Improvement Plan was focused on creating stronger language learning environments which research<sup>189,190</sup> suggests helps prepare children for the more challenging demands placed on oracy as they proceed through school and can also reduce the number of children identified as experiencing SLCN.

The Communication Team completed the SSLiC Self-Assessment School Audit to review the school's language provision. In addition, observations in Nursery, Reception and Key Stage 1 classes using the

185 Law, J., Todd, L., Clark, T., Mroz, M., & Carr, J. (2013). Early Language Delays in the UK. Save the Children UK.

186 Locke, A., Ginsborg, J., & Peers, I. (2002). Development and disadvantage: implications for the early years and beyond. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders*, 37(1), 3-15.

187 Tracey, L., Bowyer-Crane, C., Bonetti, S., Nielsen, D., D'Apice, K. and Compton, S. (2022). The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Children's Socio-Emotional Wellbeing and Attainment during the Reception Year. Research Report. Education Endowment Foundation.

188 Bakopoulou, I. (2022). The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on early years transition to school in the UK context. *Education 3-13*, DOI: 10.1080/03004279.2022.2114807.

189 Dockrell, J.E., Lindsay, G., Roulstone, S., & Law, J. (2014). Supporting children with speech, language and communication needs: An overview of the results of the Better Communication Research Programme. *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*, 49, 43-57

190 Dockrell, J.E., Bakopoulou, I., Law, J., Spencer, S., & Lindsay, G. (2015). Capturing communication supporting classrooms: The development of a tool and feasibility study. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 31(3), 271-286.

Communication Supporting Classrooms Observation Tool (CSCOT)<sup>191</sup> were conducted to profile the language learning environments and gather more information about existing good practice and areas for development. Strengths were identified across the classes. Nevertheless, there were some areas that needed developing. For example, areas for development were identified within the Communication Supporting Classroom domain of the SSLiC Self-Assessment School Audit, with a particular focus on the need to improve the language learning environments and provide more language learning opportunities. With this in mind, the Communication Team wished to strengthen language learning environments by increasing resources in Nursery, EYFS and Key Stage 1, in particular, the need to purchase more non-fiction books. Research suggests that access to good quality, non-fiction books promotes the development of language and communication by extending children's vocabulary<sup>192</sup>. There were also areas for development in relation to increasing the opportunities to engage in structured conversations with adults and peers. Empirical literature<sup>193,194,195</sup> indicates that creating structured opportunities for children to talk together and teachers having structured opportunities to talk with children encourages development of language, allowing vocabulary to be promoted, and sentences to be modelled and extended.

Finally, within the Staff Professional Development and Learning domain of the SSLiC Self-Assessment School Audit, the Communication Team recognised a need to consult staff more regularly about the areas of support and development needed in relation to children's language and communication and a need to provide more opportunities to cascade areas of good practice to all staff.

## What was done?

In order to support change across the Nursery, EYFS and Key Stage 1 classrooms, the Communication Team carried out a number of actions:

### Improving classroom environments to support oral language by increasing access to non-fiction books

Initially, the Communication Team asked all class teachers across the school to identify non-fiction books needed in their class. This resulted in a list of non-fiction books for each class. On reviewing this list, the Communication Team identified particular themes (for example, space, nature, wildlife) across the classes. It was considered important to offer a range of different books covering the same topic for different stages of language development.

### Improving and increasing opportunities within the classroom for spoken interactions

The Communication Team presented the research evidence related to the importance of language learning opportunities in a whole staff meeting at the end of January 2023. As a result of this meeting, teaching teams committed to either provide more structured opportunities to children to interact with peers or adults across the week and decided on a way to monitor this change.

### Profiling the training needs of teaching staff and ensuring good practice is cascaded across the school

Alongside this, the Communication Team disseminated a questionnaire to class teachers and support staff to gain an insight into potential areas of development and training needed. The questionnaire asked school staff about the training they had had and the training they would like. 13 staff members responded to the questionnaire (out of a possible 20) identifying having had some form of training, but the majority recognised a need to develop their knowledge in this area further,

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191 Dockrell, J.E., Bakopoulou, I., Law, J., Spencer, S., & Lindsay, G. (2012). Communication Supporting Classroom Observation Tool. Freely available from: <https://speechandlanguage.org.uk/talking-point/for-professionals/the-communication-trust/more-resources/classroom-supporting-tool/>

192 Kuhn, K.E., Rausch, C.M., McCarty, T.G., Montgomery, S.E. and Rule, A.C., 2017. Utilizing nonfiction texts to enhance reading comprehension and vocabulary in primary grades. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 45, pp.285-296.

193 Best, W., Melvin, D., & Williams, S. (1993). The effectiveness of communication groups in day nurseries. *European Journal of Disordered Communication*, 28, 187-212.

194 Bickford-Smith, A., Wijayatilake, L., & Woods, G. (2005). Evaluating the Effectiveness of an Early Years Language Intervention. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 21(3), 161-173.

195 Girolametto, L., & Weitzman, E. (2002). Responsiveness of childcare providers interactions with toddlers and preschool-ers. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, 33,268-281

with many highlighting an introduction to speech, language and communication needs as something that would be beneficial to their practice. Given this was an area of professional development identified by most, the Communication Team decided to prioritise two members of staff to attend the training. To maximise the impact, the Communication Team ensured there was a system in place for those attending the training to feedback to the whole school to cascade their learning to all other teaching teams.

## What were the findings and outcomes of the project?

The main outcome of the Woodlands Academy SSLiC Project related to developing stronger communication-supporting classrooms in the Nursery, EYFS and Key Stage 1. A range of non-fiction books based on children's interest are now available with specific books based on particularly popular themes (such as space) being available to support different levels of learning. This has important positive implications for pupils as they progress through the school and particularly as those children in Nursery and Reception classes transition into Year 1. Research has highlighted large variability amongst classroom environments, with many of the features conducive to an effective language learning environment being absent in most Key Stage 1 classrooms<sup>196,197</sup>.

Another key finding of the Woodlands Academy SSLiC Project was a 45% increase in observed language learning opportunities (using the CSCOT) across Nursery, Reception and Key Stage 1 classrooms. Particularly in Nursery, there was a significant change in the opportunities provided to children to have structured interactions with peers and adults when compared to initial observations at the beginning of the project. Exposure to structured interactions with adults and peers on a regular basis is recognised as likely to lead to positive gains in children's oral language<sup>198, 199</sup>.

Finally, a key outcome of the SSLiC Woodlands Academy Project was a clear insight into the professional development and learning needs of school staff in the area of language and communication. The Woodlands Academy Communication Team reflected on elements of effective professional development and the need to develop systems and processes to allow all school staff to benefit from professional development opportunities by ensuring knowledge is cascaded across the school. Effective professional development needs to ensure clear mechanisms for learning including opportunities to revisit and feeding back training<sup>200</sup>

## Key Learning

The Woodlands Academy SSLiC Project has demonstrated that conversations between adults and children that are characterised by high quality language learning interactions are the core of the communication-supporting school environment. Regular profiling of classroom environments and of the opportunities provided to children for language learning are significant elements of reflective educational practice that can effect changes and support the oral language of all students, not only the ones with identified SLCN.

Underpinning the Woodlands Academy SSLiC Project has been the process of using an evidence based audit and observation tool as a means for staff professional development, recognising areas for personal and school development and implementing specific changes to address these development areas. Using evidence-based approaches can give a solid basis on which to build improvements and inform future good practice. The challenge now will be on how to maintain the process and sustain the improvements made over time.

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196 Dockrell, J.E., Bakopoulou, I., Law, J., Spencer, S., & Lindsay, G. (2015). Capturing communication supporting classrooms: The development of a tool and feasibility study. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 31(3), 1-16.

197 Law, J., Tulip, J., Stringer, H., Cockerill, M., & Dockrell, J.E. (2019). Teachers observing classroom communication: An application of the Communication Supporting Classroom Observation Tool for children aged 4-7 years. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 35(3), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265659019869792>.

198 Best, W., Melvin, D., & Williams, S. (1993). The effectiveness of communication groups in day nurseries. *European Journal of Disordered Communication*, 28, 187-212.

199 Bickford-Smith, A., Wijayatilake, L., & Woods, G. (2005). Evaluating the Effectiveness of an Early Years Language Intervention. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 21(3), 161-173.

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## Cabot Primary School

### Describing and supporting children's SLCN and carefully monitoring progression in language interventions

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## Background

Cabot Primary school is in the St Paul's area of central Bristol. In the academic year 2022-2023, a total of 181 pupils were on school register. The school noted 21% of children with special education needs and disability (SEND) with a mix of needs including Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH), Communication and Interaction and Autistic Spectrum Conditions as the most prevalent area of SEND in the school. The school has a high number of children with English as an Additional Language (EAL) which represents 83% of pupils. Although there is a majority of children with Somali as their first language, in total there are 24 different languages spoken by children attending the school. The school also experiences a high mobility of children coming into the school. There is research to suggest that English language learning alongside pupil mobility can be a risk factor for pupils underachieving in education when compared to their monolingual English speakers<sup>201</sup>. The school also has 50% of pupils receiving pupil premium, a factor highlighted as linked to lower language levels<sup>202</sup>. Research suggests that children entering schools in socially disadvantaged areas more frequently experience language difficulties<sup>203</sup> even when other cognitive skills are within the expected range<sup>204</sup>. There is also evidence to indicate there is an increased risk in children underachieving in their education when English language learning presents together with social deprivation<sup>205</sup>. School staff at Cabot Primary have also noticed that language learning needs have increased in Reception and Year 1 following the Covid-19 pandemic, a concern that has also been highlighted in recent national research<sup>206,207</sup>. For these reasons, the school has focused on the development of children's oral language in their School Improvement Plan through improving the teaching of

201 Strand, S., Malmberg, L. and Hall, J., (2015). English as an Additional Language (EAL) and educational achievement in England: An analysis of the National Pupil Database.

202 Locke, A., Ginsborg, J., & Peers, I. (2002). Development and disadvantage: implications for the early years and beyond. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders*, 37(1), 3-15.

203 Law, J., Lindsay, G., Peacey, P., Gascoigne M., Soloff, N., Radford, J., Band, S., and Fitzgerald, L. (2000) Provision for children's speech and language needs in England and Wales: facilitating communication between education and health services. DfES research report 23.

204 Locke, A., Ginsborg, J., & Peers, I. (2002). Development and disadvantage: implications for the early years and beyond. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders*, 37(1), 3-15.

205 Strand, S., Malmberg, L. and Hall, J., (2015). English as an Additional Language (EAL) and educational achievement in England: An analysis of the National Pupil Database.

206 Tracey, L., Bowyer-Crane, C., Bonetti, S., Nielsen, D., D'Apice, K. and Compton, S. (2022). The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Children's Socio-Emotional Wellbeing and Attainment during the Reception Year. Research Report. Education Endowment Foundation.

207 Bakopoulou, I. (2022). The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on early years transition to school in the UK context. *Education* 3-13, DOI: 10.1080/03004279.2022.2114807.

oracy skills in order to raise pupils' attainment in English and Maths. There is research to suggest children with language difficulties can experience difficulties across their learning including in their literacy<sup>208</sup>, writing<sup>209</sup> and numeracy skills<sup>210</sup> and, therefore, a focus on oral language will aim to support further academic attainment.

At the start of the SSLiC Project, a Communication Team came together with representation across the school team to ensure optimal impact and wider reach. Having commitment from those in leadership positions with broader representation across the school team is identified as an effective way to support change and ensure successful implementation of projects<sup>211,212</sup>. Completion of the SSLiC Self-Assessment School Audit identified areas of developing practice in how classrooms support communication including developing a more consistent use of language learning interactions (LLI) and providing high-quality language learning opportunities (LLO) for children. Although an area of good practice was the production of One Page Profiles for children with SEND, there was an acknowledgement that there was no system in place to ensure these were being viewed by all members of staff. The Communication Team was also aware that there was no regular monitoring of skill level of all staff in relation to children's language and communication development. With this in mind, the Communication Team wanted to ensure that the advice within the One Page Profiles was properly disseminated and being utilised.

## What was done?

The SSLiC Cabot Primary project aimed:

### To better describe and identify children's SLCN

It was a priority for the Communication Team to build on the school's strength in the production of One Page Profiles by ensuring all members of the teaching team (class teachers and support staff) were regularly reading and were able to support the needs of children with SLCN with the strategies outlined in the One Page Profiles.

A short online survey was initially disseminated to all members of the teaching team asking them to note whether they had accessed all One Page Profiles in their class. 16 staff members responded to the survey indicating that 8 staff members had accessed all the One Page Profiles, 7 had accessed some and 1 had not accessed any.

It was then agreed that One Page Profiles would be within the SEND folder in each class and that all class teachers would ensure teaching staff in their class, including new support staff, knew where this folder was kept. The class teachers would monitor this by placing a sign sheet in the SEND folder so that staff members can sign and date when they have read each One Page Profile. It was also agreed that the class teachers would check this regularly. The Communication Team encouraged all staff to annotate the profiles to show where any changes or updates to the One Page Profiles were required.

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- 208 Stothard, S. E., Snowling, M. J., Bishop, D., Chipchase, B. B., & Kaplan, C. A. (1998). Language-Impaired Preschoolers: A Follow-Up Into Adolescence. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 41(2), 407-418.
- 209 Dockrell, J., Ricketts, J., Charman, T., & Lindsay, G. (2014). Exploring writing products in students with language impairments and autism spectrum disorders. *Learning and Instruction*, 32, 81-90.
- 210 Harrison, L. J., McLeod, S., Berthelsen, D., & Walker, S. (2009). Literacy, numeracy, and learning in school-aged children identified as having speech and language impairment in early childhood. *International Journal of Speech and Language Pathology*, 11(5), 392-403.
- 211 Kotter, JP. (2012). *Leading Change*. Boston, Mass: Harvard Business Review Press
- 212 Education Endowment Foundation (2019) [Putting Evidence to Work - A School's Guide to Implementation | EEF \(educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk\)](https://www.educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk) accessed 5th June 2023.

### To carefully monitor children's progress through the involvement in language interventions

The second priority for the Communication Team was to identify the strategies class teachers and support staff are commonly using from the One Page Profiles to support children with SLCN. It was hoped that this would allow the Communication Team to identify any areas of professional development that might be needed. The Communication Team reviewed the One Page Profiles for children with SLCN and were able to identify a range of strategies commonly suggested to support children with SLCN. They identified 10 common strategies suggested for supporting children's understanding of spoken language and 9 common strategies suggested for supporting children's spoken language. A further online survey was disseminated to teaching teams asking them to identify which strategies they use to support children's understanding and use of spoken language, the findings identified a variety of strategies that were commonly used and others that were used less often.

Teaching staff were also asked how they remember appropriate strategies to use with children and how they learn new strategies to support children's language and communication. According to the survey findings, talking to colleagues was rated as the most commonly used way of learning or remembering strategies, whereas less than half of the teaching staff identified reading information about strategies in children's One Page Profiles as an effective way of remembering strategies.

### To support effective professional development

Following analysis of the surveys, the Communication Team reflected on the most effective way to support professional development of teaching staff moving forwards. Research suggests moving away from professional development focusing on courses and towards more individual-focused, school- and

practitioner-led approaches<sup>213,214</sup>. It is also highlighted that approaches that use observational learning<sup>215</sup> and feedback<sup>216,217</sup> lead to better outcomes in developing practitioner interactions with children to support language.

Therefore, the Communication Team selected the use of sentence stems as an area for further professional development. Training was delivered to Learning Support Assistants initially and took the format of supporting use of sentence stems through small group discussions, giving examples of use, providing opportunities to practise and observe others during the week as well as ensuring opportunities to feedback as a small group after practising. The Communication Team also used a staff room wall to display visual information about sentence stems to all staff.

## What were the findings and outcomes of the project?

The Cabot Primary SSLiC Project identified the need for stronger processes to ensure One Page Profiles are consistently accessed and the strategies within them were being used. One Page Profiles provide the platform for sharing information across staff but also a person-centred record that can move with the child as they transition to higher classes. On repeating the initial staff survey, there was a significant increase with 12 out of 13 teaching staff identifying they had read all the One Page Profiles for the children they work with. This has important positive implications given research which has shown that teachers and support staff can feel unprepared and lack the skill and confidence in identifying children's language learning needs<sup>218</sup>.

The other key finding of the Cabot Primary SSLiC Project was that using a systematic approach in identifying professional development needs supported professionals' learning and confident use of strategies

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213 Knight, P., & Trowler, P. (2001). *Departmental leadership in higher education*. McGraw-Hill Education, UK

214 Harland, J., & Kinder, K. (1997). Teachers' continuing professional development: Framing a model of outcomes. *British Journal of In-Service Education*, 23(1), 71-84 66

215 Myers, D.M., Simonsen, B., & Sugai, G. (2011). Increasing teachers' use of praise with a response-to-intervention approach. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 34(1), 35-59

216 Rathel, J. M., Drasgow, E., & Christle, C. C. (2008). Effects of supervisor performance feedback on increasing preservice teachers' positive communication behaviors with students with emotional and behavioral disorders. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 16(2), 67-77.

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218 Dockrell, J.E., Howell, P., Leung, D., & Fugard, A.J. (2017). Children with speech, language and communication needs in England: challenges for practice. *Frontiers in Education*, 2, 35

suggested within the One Page Profiles. Research has repeatedly demonstrated the lack of confidence in supporting language learning needs and using evidence-based approaches to do so<sup>219</sup>. By asking teaching staff which strategies they use more often to support children with SLCN, the Communication Team was able to identify strategies that were used less often (such as use of sentence stems) despite training being offered to all staff in the past. On repeating the survey, teaching staff reported feeling confident in using sentence stems. Importantly, having a system in place that ensures professional development effectively builds knowledge, motivates staff, develops teaching techniques and embeds practice<sup>220</sup> was, for Cabot Primary School, the most significant way forward.

## Key learning

One of the key learnings points from the Cabot SSLIC Project was a need to ensure a system was in place to share key information about children's needs and to effectively monitor this. The production of One Page Profiles was a strength in the school but by not monitoring the access to these it was possible that much of the advice was being missed. The SEND Code of Practice places a great emphasis on increasing teacher responsibility for the progress of children with SLCN, and this can be achieved with greater staff awareness of the importance of oral language and their role in supporting it. Creating effective systems of support and dissemination of good practice and embedding these within school policy is a big challenge for educational professionals, but one that is proven to effect lasting changes and contribute to expanding and strengthening the evidence base<sup>221</sup>.

Further to this, the Communication Team reflected that delivering training and supporting professional development does not always mean change in what people do. Survey of teaching staff's use of strategies highlighted that some strategies were not being used consistently even when training had been provided.

Professional development that allows for practice and feedback is more effective in developing staff confidence in using strategies. This is supported by research<sup>222,223</sup> that suggests training delivered by workshops and courses is less effective than person led training that allows for observation, feedback and reflection.

The Cabot Primary Communication Team plan to continue to develop their processes of professional development for all teaching staff. The challenge, of course, remains in sustaining the positive changes made and continuing to improve professionals' confidence and teaching practice.

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219 Dockrell, J. E., & Hurry, J. (2018). The identification of speech and language problems in elementary school: Diagnosis and co-occurring needs. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 81, 52-64

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221 Cordingley, P., Higgins, S., Greany, T., Buckler, N., Coles-Jordan, D., Crisp, B., Saunders, L., Coe, R. (2015). *Developing Great Teaching: Lessons from the international reviews into effective professional development*. Teacher Development Trust.

222 Knight, P., & Trowler, P. (2001). *Departmental leadership in higher education*. McGraw-Hill Education, UK

223 Harland, J., & Kinder, K. (1997). Teachers' continuing professional development: Framing a model of outcomes. *British Journal of In-Service Education*, 23(1), 71-84



# Conclusion

The participants in the SSLiC programme implemented a variety of changes in their early years settings and schools at pupil, practitioner and school levels. At the pupil level, initiatives included a more tailored and individualised support of identified SLCN. At practitioner and school levels, some of the participants used the SSLiC programme as a springboard in their school to enhance staff understanding of language development, further support professional development and effect systemic setting and school changes in assessing and identifying language needs as well as working collaboratively with external professionals. Ultimately, all participants reported that they used the SSLiC programme to raise the profile of the importance of oral language for children's educational attainment. One of the aims of the SSLiC programme is to continue to support developments in practice after the programme has ended through ongoing review of the self-assessment audit and action plan. All of the early years settings and primary schools in the SSLiC programme have continued with their focus on the projects described in this publication and in doing so are ensuring that their work contributes to the wider evidence base for supporting pupils with SLCN.





Supporting Spoken Language in the Classroom (SSLiC) is a knowledge exchange programme that aims to support the development of practice in schools and to expand the evidence base to ultimately improve outcomes for children with speech, language and communication needs.



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