The relationship between SPEECH, LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION NEEDS (SLCN) AND BEHAVIOURAL DIFFICULTIES



By Claire Lidyard, education consultant

In 2012 the DfE published a research report which examined 'The relationship between speech, language, communication needs and behavioural difficulties' (DFE: 2012) and findings showed that, "Pupils with SLCN were more likely to have significant peer problems and emotional difficulties and less developed prosocial behaviour (than the general population of the same age)".

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists published 'Understanding the links between communication and behaviour' (RCSLT: 2019), which gave some startling statistics about that relationship. It asserts that "81% of children with emotional and behavioural disorders have significant unidentified communication needs" and "more than 60% of young people who are accessing youth justice services present with SLCN which are largely unrecognised" (RCSLT: 2019).

I've been lucky enough to have worked in primary and secondary schools, a special provision and as 'Lead Adviser for SEND and Inclusion' in Kent. In the county, supporting SLCN is at the forefront of the help students with SEND are offered. It is also recognised that an evidence-based system for schools to identify and support receptive language and difficulties with functional, communicational skills is important. This enables over-stretched local speech and language therapy services to focus on students with more severe needs.

The research clearly demonstrates the significance of the link between SLCN and challenging behaviours - but what does that mean for schools?

Early identification is well cited as fundamental for supporting speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) and it is why the standardised screening and interactive interventions that the Secondary Language Link programme offers has been such an important part of the process for me.

I worked alongside a secondary school in East Kent who were new to Secondary Language Link. The school had screened their Y7 cohort with the online standardised assessment, and we had begun examining the data from the individual reports generated and considering groupings of identified students for interventions.

The SENCo and I looked at behaviour data for some of the identified students and cross referenced them to the areas of receptive language that were identified through the Secondary Language Link screener. As we explored this further, many examples of links between behaviours and academic progress were demonstrated (in and out of class) that could be linked to the Secondary Language Link assessment results.

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of young people who are accessing youth justice services present with SLCN which are largely unrecognised.

As a result of this, the decision was made to deliver whole staff training on the link that we had discovered between speech, language and communication, academic progress and behaviour.

The training was presented in the following way:

- Anonymised Secondary Language Link profiles were presented to staff who were then asked to consider who those pupils might be.
- Staff then discussed some of the behaviours seen in class from key students who were not engaging.
- The final part of the session revealed the identities of the pupils and asked the staff to map the behaviours they had identified to those students.



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of children with emotional and behavioural disorders have significant unidentified communication need

They were able to see the correlation between the challenging behaviour exhibited by these key students and, their Secondary Language Link profile.

Staff reported that it was an interesting insight into why particular behaviours or responses might be demonstrated in the classroom and around school.

The impact of the training was evidenced over the next few months through learning walks, which identified the use of appropriate strategies and behaviour data, and the results were that, for some key pupils, there was a reduction in negative behaviours.
Quality First teaching and training on SLCN has had a demonstrably positive impact.

In the wake of the pandemic, it has been even more of a priority to ensure that there is widespread knowledge and understanding of how to identify, recognise and support SLCN, particularly when the research demonstrates the significant relationship between SLCN and behaviour and the negative long-term impact those needs can have on an individual's ability to thrive in life. Secondary Language Link's in-package training module provides school staff with the knowledge and skills to make a real difference to the lives of young people.

What is Secondary LanguageLink?

Secondary Language Link is an innovative, standardised assessment and intervention package used by school staff to identify and support students with language and communication needs. It suitable for students aged 11 -14 years, including leaners new to English.

Schools purchase Secondary Language Link via an annual subscription. Key features include:

- A standardised language assessment
- Individual student analysis of language & communication skills
- Video guides created by our speech and language therapists (SaLTs) for delivering communication & language intervention groups
- Engaging, interactive, video-based interventions
- Built-in measures to assess progress
- Reports per pupil, class, year and Key Stage
- An online staff training resource
- High quality resources including teaching strategies and lesson plans
- Materials to help families support their children at home

Find out why thousands of schools place their trust in our award-winning online packages to help them deliver high quality support for young people. Book a free no obligation trial to explore the tools in detail at a time that suits you.

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