

The Link

PRIMARY

THE SPEECH & LANGUAGE MAGAZINE FOR SCHOOLS

ISSUE
30
2024

Helping schools
support speech
and language
from school entry
to age 11

INFANT

Language Link

Speech Link

JUNIOR Language Link

Brought to you by: Speech & Language Link - visit speechandlanguage.link



BSL AND MAKATON

Do they support spoken language?
Page 4



GETTING IT RIGHT!

How your speech and language
provision could look.
Page 12



SUPPORTING YOUR TA

How a teacher/TA partnership provides
the best classroom SLCN support.
Page 16

CONTENTS

3

The Link Live - get your free ticket



4-5

How signing can support spoken language

By Yin Collighan, SaLT

6

Identifying and supporting language needs in EYFS

Introducing Little Link



7

Speech & Language Link - a valuable resource

By Margaret Relf, SENDCo

8-9

EAL and multilingualism vs SLCN

By Alison Fowle, SaLT

10-11

ANS

By Samantha Garner, mental health & inclusion consultant, and founder of Balanced People Ltd incorporating Balanced Schools

12-13

Getting SLCN support right

The Speech & Language Link Whole School Approach



14

Ask a therapist

By Juliet Leonard, SaLT

15

Research opportunity

Get Infant Language link free for a year!

16-17

Supporting your TA

By Sara Alston, SEND and safeguarding trainer and consultant, SEA Inclusion & Safeguarding

18-19

The Link Community

Editor's Letter



Welcome to the autumn issue of The Link, brought to you from Speech & Language Link, your trusted specialists in speech and language.

In this term's Link we have included an article about the other award-winning services we offer to schools. "Getting SLCN support right", on page 10, covers all aspects of our whole school approach. Language levels of children on school entry are once again in the news and our packages allow schools to assess those levels and to put support in place where needed at any age. This helps to ensure the fundamental speech and language skills that form the basis of oracy and literacy can be developed throughout a child's time at primary school.

As always, we have lots of articles around different areas of SLCN with practical advice and information on how you can help your pupils to achieve their full potential.

Check out Link Live presenter, Sam Garner's article on page 10. As a mental health and inclusion consultant she's the expert on the

autonomic nervous system and how it is central to understanding student behaviours and supporting mental health and wellbeing. (She'll also tell you how to stimulate your vagus nerve!)

Our regular **Our Ask a therapist** feature tackles a tricky topic – how to build a relationship with a parent who, shall we say, thinks they have all the answers – see page 14 for some great relationship-building ideas.

Page 4 is about BSL and Makaton. Can they support spoken language? Our therapist, **Yin Collighan**, explains why signing far from hinders the development of speech.

We hope that The Link continues to be a valued resource for all of you working with pupils with SLCN. As ever, we would love to hear from you.

Please get in touch at editor@speechlink.co.uk

Claire Chambers

*Editor, The Link
Speech & Language Link,
award-winning support for SLCN*

DLD SURVEY RESULTS

In our last issue we ran a survey to find out just how much teaching staff get taught about DLD. We had lots of responses from primary and secondary school staff – thank you for taking the time to get involved!

As promised 3 limited edition Speech & Language Link travel mugs are winging their way to 3 of the entrants.

For the results of the survey please visit our blog at: <https://shorturl.at/grQBg>



speechandlanguage.link

Contact our Speech & Language Link Help Desk at: helpdesk@speechlink.co.uk or phone 0333 577 0784



The Link Live

Speech & language day 2024

BROUGHT
TO YOU BY
THE LINK
COMMUNITY

3



LinkLive
EVENTS

Date: 21st November

Time: 9:00 – 16:00

Venue: Online

Bringing speech and language therapists and specialist SEND speakers together to present on a range of topics aimed at helping you support SLCN in early years, primary and secondary settings.

- 8 presentations
- Delegate chat throughout the day
- Live Q&A with speakers

MORNING SESSION

- 9:00 **Host, Kate Freeman**, Introduction and Welcome
- 9:10 **Gary Aubin**, Maximising your impact as a SENCo
- 10:00 **Jean Gross CBE**, Reaching the unseen children: language issues for disadvantaged pupils
- 11:00 **Kylie Rio-Wood**, Whole school approach to SLCN

12:00 Lunch Break

AFTERNOON SESSION

13:00

PRIMARY SESSION

Juliet Leonard & Alison Fowle

Rhythm & Rhyme Time in the pre-school years

SECONDARY SESSION

Samantha Gamblen

How SLCNs can lead to involvement in the youth justice system

14:00

PRIMARY SESSION

Sara Alston

Effectively supporting your TAs

SECONDARY SESSION

Samantha Garner

Understanding the link between language, emotion and behaviour

15:00 **Ioan Berry**, DLD and the impact on a whole family

15:55 **Kate Freeman**, end-of-day summary and close



The Speech & Language Link
whole school approach



More info: shorturl.at/PysGB



How signing can support spoken language



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

What is signing?

Signing is a way to support an individual with SLCN. It is a no-tech alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) approach widely used with pupils whose speech is unintelligible, or whose language and communication are developing differently with diagnoses such as developmental language disorder (DLD) or learning disability. It can be used to support understanding and provides a means of communication for pupils who otherwise struggle to share information verbally.

Signing uses hand gestures alongside facial expression and body language to convey meaning and support communication. Signing systems include sign languages (e.g., British Sign Language, Irish Sign Language – these are mainly used by the Deaf community) with their own grammar and syntax, or sign-supported speech (e.g., Makaton, Signalong or Sign Supported English) where signs are used alongside key spoken words. This article will focus on sign-supported speech.

Will signing stop pupils from talking?

Absolutely not! In fact, research consistently shows that signing supports and enhances language development (see Larkin, 2021, for a literature review). Adults continue to talk alongside using signs, so children still hear spoken language. Signing also has a benefit of forcing the adult to slow their speech rate, so children have more time to process the message. It allows information to be shared in different modalities (visual, motor and verbal), and therefore makes it more accessible to a wider range of learners. As children develop spoken language, many naturally drop the



signs as they will use the method of communication that is fastest, easiest and most efficient. Some will not develop a fully verbal communication system; in these cases, it is imperative that they have an alternative means of communication in place (such as signing) so that their voice can be “heard”.

How can I communicate when I don't know any signs?

When I plan a holiday, I often have in mind some functional vocabulary and phrases I am eager to try. But when I get there, and faced with the opportunity to use my new-found skills, I get flustered and default to English. I worry about being misunderstood, looking silly, and being asked a follow up question, which I would not be able to respond to.

It's easy to understand why we can lack confidence with using a new signing system. The best thing to do is to have a go, have fun with it and be okay with making mistakes from time to time! There is plenty of training available, including through charities. If the pupil has



an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), the requirements for staff should be written in there. Should the child's needs change or no system be in place, your speech and language therapy service can provide guidance.

Use natural gestures if you are unsure of the sign to use in the moment. The best gestures to use are the ones that show what an object looks like or what can be done with it. For example, holding your hands in the shape of an open book when you say "book" and indicate "reading" by moving your head left to right whilst looking at your "book".

What strategies can we use to include pupils who use sign systems in daily activities?

Using visual aids such as pictures, diagrams and videos that incorporate signing can support whole class understanding. Some sign systems have an accompanying symbol package that can be used across different visual supports. Getting the class involved encourages inclusivity; incorporate signing into daily lessons

and routines, including story time, and pair your students with peers who can sign or are willing to learn. Importantly, ensure that staff are equipped with signs that are functional and meaningful for each individual.

Can pupils use signing alongside another form of AAC?

Absolutely! We all use different means to communicate at different times. With our students, a Total Communication approach is always encouraged. A child with a voice output communication aid (VOCA) or a communication book may choose to use sign or gesture in certain situations; the important thing is that they are communicating and we should validate and celebrate all attempts to communicate.

I want to teach signing to my pupils! Where do I start?

You teach it as you would any language. Start with the basics e.g., frequently used words like 'help', 'like' or 'jump', and remember *always* say the word whilst signing it. Songs, stories and interactive games will



make learning fun and engaging. Only introduce a few signs at a time (depending on your pupils' abilities, it could just be one at a time). Regularly review and reinforce previous signs throughout the day to help generalise knowledge and encourage practice with peers. It's worth watching signing programmes (e.g., *Something Special* on BBC teaches Makaton) to get ideas that could work with your students! Have fun!

References:

Larkin, A (2021). 'How effective is Makaton in encouraging communication, the formation of speech, and enhancing positive social interaction in children and young people?' *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, 106, A177.

Speech & Language Link offer an exciting opportunity for nursery/ pre-school settings

LittleLink

Take part in our Research Study

With over 20 years of experience in creating speech and language support tools for schools, we are thrilled to announce the development of our new early years package, **Little Link**.

What is Little Link?

Little Link is a universal language screening tool for children aged 3-5 and a 12-week language enrichment programme to provide a boost for every child, based on an original and beautifully illustrated set of books.

We have an exciting opportunity for nursery/pre-school settings to take part in a large research study.

Speech & Language Link and the University of Cambridge Psychometrics Centre are delivering a national study to develop and finalise the universal screening assessment for our Little Link package.



What do settings need to do?

- 🐻 Complete our online assessment with a minimum of 15 children in your nursery cohort (takes 10-15 mins per child)

Benefits to settings for taking part:

- 🐻 A summary report for the group of children assessed
- 🐻 A FREE 1-hour live CPD webinar training session delivered by a speech and language therapist

HOW CAN YOUR SETTING GET INVOLVED?

Please visit <https://shorturl.at/2x6H6> to find out more information and to express your interest. We are expecting interest to be high, and places are limited, so please register to secure your place.



Speech & Language Link – a valuable resource

By **Margaret Relf**, SENDCo, Anglesey Primary Academy

When I became SENCo in 2004, speech and language therapists (SaLT) were still able to attend School Action Plus reviews and meet with schools three times a year. However, things were starting to change. Therapists began leaving the service, and it became increasingly difficult for schools to make referrals. Many of the referrals were rejected for not meeting the necessary criteria.

At that time, I was working in Derby City, an area with high levels of deprivation. The local authority was seeking ways to reduce the number of inappropriate referrals to the already overburdened SaLT services and decided to pilot the use of Speech Link. Our school was chosen to participate in this pilot scheme. We received a CD with the programme and attended training on how to use the package to identify and support students with speech sound difficulties.

I remember feeling sceptical at first, even voicing my concern by saying, "This will replace the therapist." However, we started including a child's Speech Link assessment report with their SaLT referrals and noticed that they were being accepted rather than rejected. Over time, screening became a routine part of the process during a child's first year at school.

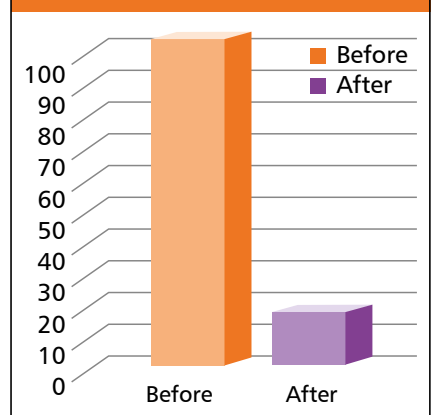
Derby City went on to purchase Speech Link for 25 of their schools.

Read the impact report here:
<https://tinyurl.com/3euxmtk8>

When I moved to Staffordshire in 2019, I found myself in a 'desert' when it came to Speech & Language Link support. Yet, the number of children with Speech, Language, and Communication Needs (SLCN) had not diminished—in fact, there were more than ever. It was baffling to see how the landscape could be so drastically different just 10 miles down the road.

Dilemma: How could we support children with clear speech and language difficulties while waiting for SaLT assessments? Having become a strong advocate for the programmes, my first request to the Head Teacher was to invest in Speech Link, as well as Infant and Junior Language Link. Her only proviso was, "Is it effective?"

Percentage of children with speech difficulties seen and discussed with speech therapy before and after Speech Link



By summer 2022, in the wake of COVID-19, local SaLT services were in disarray, with waiting times stretching up to 12 months. Fortunately, we had the Speech Link and Language Link screeners, interventions, and resources available to support children with significant needs while they awaited appointments. Including our Speech & Language Link reports with SaLT referrals proved invaluable, as it provided solid evidence that helped the therapists triage cases more effectively.

Today, in 2024, my ongoing mission is to ensure continued support for our pupils through Speech Link and Language Link. My goal is to establish these invaluable resources as a standard across all schools within our Multi-Academy Trust, for the benefit of every child.



EAL AND MULTILINGUALISM VERSUS SLCN -

how to support learners differently



By Alison Fowle, speech and language therapist

Language difficulties are common in pupils who are learning English as an additional language (EAL learners), and those with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). This can sometimes result in them being grouped together for interventions and supported in a similar way. However, whilst there are strategies and resources that can support the language and communication needs of ALL learners in the classroom, it is vital that we recognise the DIFFERENT challenges faced by those with EAL versus those with SLCN and adapt how we support each group.

SLCN is an umbrella term used for children who have difficulties with speech, language or communication skills (or a combination of these). SLCN is by far the most common Special Educational Need (SEN) in primary school age children (DfE, 2023). 10% of children or approximately 3 in every class have persistent SLCN, and as many as 50% of children in areas of social deprivation start school with poor language skills, largely due to low levels of language exposure.

Learning English as an additional language does not fall under the category of SLCN. Unlike many types of SLCN, pupils with EAL or multilingual learners as is the new preferred term, will not have persistent or life-long language difficulties (in the absence of any co-existing SLCN). The challenge for multilingual learners in



the short-term is learning English alongside their home language(s) and navigating a different set of vocabulary and grammar rules, whilst trying to access the curriculum, articulate their needs and learn social language with peers, all at the same time.

Multilingual learners who are proficient in their first language usually develop a second language quite quickly and you would expect to see their understanding and use of English to improve rapidly during their first year in school.

In contrast, SLCN can have a significant impact on all aspects of a child's development including learning, literacy, behaviour, emotional literacy and social interaction. For some, difficulties will remain throughout their school life and beyond, including those with lifelong diagnoses such as Developmental Language Disorder (persistent difficulties with talking and/or understanding language) or Autism.

We need to bear in mind however, that multilingual learners are just as likely to experience SLCN as their monolingual peers. If a learner has SLCN, they will experience difficulties in all the languages they use, not just in English. Identifying these children can be tricky, but a good starting point would be to speak with the child's parents to find out whether they have any concerns about home language skills.

All learners, including multilingual and/or those with SLCN will benefit from having access to an inclusive, nurturing, communication friendly environment, where visual cues are used to support understanding, alongside use of other high-quality teaching strategies. Strategies include providing clear explanations, breaking instructions down and checking in with pupils regularly during tasks (Language Link offers a wealth of printable classroom resources to support each strategy).

Children with SLCN who are missed or misinterpreted may exhibit challenging behaviour, have literacy difficulties and/or poor academic progress. Universal screening at each of the key stages of education ensures that

every child with SLCN, including those with mild and moderate needs, is identified and targeted support put in place early. Language Link provides a standardised assessment to be administered to all pupils in reception, year 3 and year 7 to identify the level and areas of language need, and provides fully resourced, small-group interventions for those who need it.

Multilingual learners are better supported within the classroom, where they will be immersed in a nurturing and language rich environment with lots of opportunities to learn from their peers. At the same time, at home, the child's family should be encouraged to continue to speak the language they are most comfortable speaking. By doing so, they will provide a good language model, which in turn will make it easier for the child to learn English. Language Link provides information on supporting multilingual learners and how to use the package with this group.

Multilingualism is an asset, which should be celebrated and encouraged for it provides great cognitive advantages which will aid a child's learning success long-term.

In the short-term, therefore, it is important to recognise the difference between language difficulties associated with multilingualism versus SLCN and ensure that each distinct group is supported differently. In fact, placing a multilingual learner in an intervention group with those with SLCN may be detrimental, for they will not have access to good language models they need.

GET A FREE TRIAL
OF INFANT AND
JUNIOR LANGUAGE
LINK HERE

tinyurl.com/mdwmx6wx





The role of REFLEX ACTIONS IN CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOUR

Sam will be speaking at The Link Live Speech and Language Day, we hope to see you there!



By **Samantha Garner** - Mental Health & Inclusion Consultant, and Founder of Balanced People Ltd incorporating Balanced Schools

Have you heard of your autonomic nervous system (ANS)? No? Don't worry, I hadn't until a couple of years ago. Basically, it's part of our nervous system that controls and regulates our internal organs. Sounds boring, I know, so why am I talking about it? I'm talking about it because it is crucial in understanding student behaviours and supporting mental health and wellbeing.

There are two main parts to the ANS. The first part is the sympathetic system which has a major role in how we respond to dangerous or stressful situations – any situation that we perceive as threatening in some way, and not just physically. When we feel threatened, and we release stress chemicals, it also triggers our reflex fight, flight, freeze responses which affect our behaviours.

We can often misunderstand these reflex responses, we just think that they are literally fighting, running away or freezing like a spider when it thinks someone is looking. But there are many other behaviours linked and also more reflex responses.

Fight

Fighting is being physically aggressive but can also be shouting and confrontational. It can also be seen when someone is very competitive, or someone who is unable to hear another point of view and won't let someone else speak. Being controlling of other people can be a fight response. Fight can also be disruptive

confrontational behaviour when a student feels slighted or 'shown up' in some way.

Flight

Flight isn't just about running away; it's also avoiding situations in the first place. Flight can look like disruptive behaviour in order to get thrown out of class.

Freeze

Freeze can be ignoring an instruction and refusing to move. It can also look like selective mutism, or daydreaming.

Someone who is unable to make decisions or procrastinates could be a freeze response – if I don't do anything then it won't be wrong. I worked with a student who refused to take exams, that way he couldn't be criticised for the result.

Friend

This response is the most often misunderstood. It's where somebody smiles or laughs when feeling threatened. Fight or flight isn't their usual reaction, so they laugh or smile. A student who smiles when being reprimanded isn't disrespectful. They're feeling threatened. Think about how many times as adults we laugh at inappropriate times – we can't deal with the intensity of the situation, so we laugh.

Fawn

Finally, there's fawn where someone goes out of their way to please others, to not make them angry. Think of the student who continually asks, 'Is this ok miss?' 'Am I doing this right miss?' It can be annoying, but it is a reflex action.

If you look closely, you can see these responses in the majority of disruptive student behaviour.



Further information:
balancedpeople.co.uk/

The second part of the ANS, and the good part, is the parasympathetic system, which tells our body to relax and heal. 75% of the parasympathetic system is in our vagus nerve which I'm sure many of you have heard of. The vagus nerve is in the neck and is our longest cranial nerve. The vagus nerve is so important to our mental health and physical health and regular stimulation improves both. There is also a great deal of research showing vagal nerve stimulation (VNS) improves the success of interventions and neural development of children, including SEN children.

So how does VNS happen? *There are a wide range of ways that have been proved by research, and many of them are already recommended as being good for us. They also don't cost a lot of money so be wary of someone trying to sell you something expensive to do it.

Acupuncture – speaks for itself. Similar is Emotional Freedom Technique also known as tapping – you tap key points on your head and body and you can make affirmations at the same time.

Music therapy – listening to music with a slow tempo, also humming and singing.

Food – omega 3 fatty acids. Polyphenols – berries, herbs and spices, cocoa powder, nuts, flaxseeds,

vegetables, olives, coffee and tea. Mediterranean diet. Soy oil. Sugar (don't hate it).

Physical activity – yoga, stretching, aerobic exercise, Tai Chi.

Therapeutic – massages, hypnosis, meditation.

Other people – social interactions, laughter, compassion, prayer.

Cold – cold water swimming, ice helmets, immersing most of face in cold water for several seconds, cold showers.

Hydrotherapy – warm water baths, aquatic therapy, steam baths, foot baths and so on.

TENS machines – using an ear clip with a TENS machine, daily for 15 minutes at a level you are

comfortable with. *Great Ormond Street have issued guidance on how effective this is for pain relief in children.

Vitamin B12 – fish, meat, poultry, eggs and dairy, foods fortified with B12.

Others – deep breathing, crying emotional tears.

So, there you have it, a brief introduction to your ANS. Be aware of it for yourself as well as children you work with. And next time someone tells you off for eating chocolate cake, tell them to leave you alone, you're stimulating your vagus nerve.

*<https://shorturl.at/IM4X0>



GETTING SLCN SUPPORT RIGHT

There is currently a focus on the speech and language skills of children starting school. This is a good thing; these skills are essential for learning, friendships, social interaction, mental health and the development of oracy and literacy. There is considerable evidence of the scale of the problem and there are assessment and intervention tools available that help schools to support children with speech, language and communication difficulties on school entry.

However, as SEND professionals are aware, these difficulties don't all magically resolve in the school entry year. This is why primary school SLCN support options should be available from school entry to age eleven.

The Speech & Language Link whole school approach is one such integrated option, (created by the publishers of your Link Magazine, who have been helping schools to support speech and language since 2004). Provided as packages covering Infant Language (age 4-7), Speech (age 4-8) and Junior Language (age 7-11) each one contains age-appropriate interventions, one-to-one programmes, standardised or norm-referenced screeners, classroom strategies and unlimited staff training. Available individually or together, the combined cost of all these packages per year is less than a single pupil premium/deprivation grant, and within your school, there are no limits on the numbers of pupils who can be assessed and have interventions provided.

speechandlanguage.link/whole-school-approach/

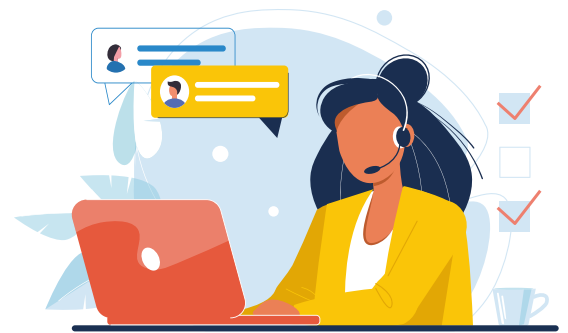
School entry

There are continuing calls for the screening of language on school entry. This approach is facilitated by the school entry screener in **Infant Language Link**, which identifies those children who would benefit from the in-school strategies and small group interventions provided, and those who should also be discussed with a speech and language therapist where possible. Assessment and interventions for the next two years in school (KS1 in England) are also included, allowing tracking of those identified and further intervention where required.

Where a child has a speech sound production problem when starting school the problem may be obvious, but whether it will resolve or need intervention, what can be helped in school and what really needs discussion with a therapist, is often less clear. This is where the **Speech Link** speech sound assessment and speech programmes can help in the school entry year and beyond.

Through the school

As noted, language problems won't always resolve in the early and infant years. Further up the school the demands placed on a child's language also increase, this means a child assessed as not having language difficulties early on may start to experience these later. For these children there is a possibility that the underlying language component of



any social and behavioural issues is overlooked. **Junior Language Link** includes an age-appropriate standardised assessment which looks at the language areas vital in the junior years. Classroom strategies, small group interventions and one-to-one activities to support junior level language are included and of course, staff training in the use of these tools.

In the later junior years there are interventions focusing on the language required for the statutory assessments which take place at this time, to help children with language difficulties reach and show their full potential.

Training included

There is no extra charge for training. Each of the aforementioned packages includes all the training needed to carefully deliver the assessment and interventions, record the progress measures and understand the reasons behind what you are doing. This is accomplished through video guides and live termly webinar training. If a member of staff leaves, you can book another onto the webinars, plus our Help Desk and therapy teams are always available for advice.



Across the school

A 'whole school approach' means that school-wide support for language beyond the classroom environment is important. All our language packages come with the Spread the Word pack. This includes posters, stickers and resources with activities suitable for breakfast clubs, breaktime and wet play.

Beyond the school

Every package of our whole school approach includes relevant activities which parents and carers can do with their children to support the school-based interventions. In addition, all schools and parents can access our Parent/Carer speech and language portal which can be found at tinyurl.com/yw7xtkd2

Support for you

All aspects of the Speech & Language Link whole school approach are supported by our Help Desk and team of eight speech and language therapists. Real support from helpful people, by phone or email, five days a week throughout the year.



CONCLUSION

Getting SLCN support right in schools is not only about identifying difficulties early but also about providing ongoing, structured, and integrated support throughout pupils' education. Speech & Language Link offers a whole school approach that aligns with these needs, providing screening, tailored interventions, unlimited staff training, and a supportive community network. <http://www.speechandlanguage.link/wsa>



ASK A Therapist

Q I'm feeling judged by a family who say they know more than me about speech and language. What should I do?



By **Juliet Leonard**,
specialist speech and language therapist

A

We have all been there. Working with families can be a pleasurable experience when they are on board and recognise the efforts and time you are giving to support their child. It can be challenging however, when a parent is keen to share their knowledge and tell you what you should be doing. So how do you handle this situation?

Deep breath!

Firstly, just pause for a moment! It is so easy to feel judged, and to take this as a criticism of what you have been doing, to reflect on your knowledge and to conclude that you are doing something wrong.

A parent who is keen to share their knowledge is telling you something else though, about how they are feeling, and if you can move beyond the personal hurt, you might just reach a place of understanding.

Think about their intention

Parents are experts in their own children and *in most cases, they want what is best for their child. Sometimes, they may have specialist knowledge and skills in a particular area, and that can be heard and considered.

Working with a child in school provides a different insight into the child's life. This is valid and it is only fair that a parent hears what you have noticed – after all, we operate very differently, in different places.

Giving an allotted time to listen to their concerns and thoughts may go a long way to establishing a healthy and progressive partnership. What do they know, that will help you in your role?

Think about a common goal

It is always a good idea to start the conversation with something that binds you: "We all want to support Jamie in the best way we can, and we all have different skills to achieve that, let's talk about our observations, and make a plan."

Trust your skills

You have training and experience in working with children. You are likely to have built a great rapport with the child and know what you need to do to support them in school.





Parents can often express frustration when their child would benefit from extra support. They want the best for them. Show them that you do too, but that you can only work within the bounds of the role to which you have been assigned. The

difficulty getting an EHCP, the lack of supporting professional time or processes that are slowing down a diagnosis are unlikely to be your responsibilities. Clarify what you can do to help, whilst making it clear where your role begins and ends.

There's always room for growth

It is not a contradiction to be confident in your skills, but keen to learn and understand more, or try things a different way. This openness to learning is what makes a good practitioner a great one.

Takeaway points:

-  Try not to take it personally
-  Listen carefully
-  Clarify your role and responsibilities
-  Make a plan together

**If you suspect that a parent is not working in the best interests of their child, be sure to discuss your observations with your safeguarding lead.*

Join our national research project and...

Get Infant Language Link FREE for 1 year!



By Louise Burton,
research lead and speech and language therapist

The Research Project

We, and the University of Cambridge Psychometrics Centre are delivering a national study to improve our Infant Language Link screening assessment for children on school entry.

The project started in September and is continuing until July 2025. We have some places left and are looking for schools who do not currently use our Infant Language Link package to take part.

HOW CAN YOUR SETTING GET INVOLVED?

Please visit <https://shorturl.at/GMQ6G> to find out more information and to express your interest. We are expecting interest to be high and only have limited places available, so please register asap to secure your place.

Speech & Language Link

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Psychometrics Centre



What do settings need to do?

Complete our online assessment with a minimum of 20 children in your school entry cohort (takes 15-20 mins per child)

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS TO SCHOOLS OF TAKING PART?



- ✓ A free subscription to our award-winning Infant Language Link package for a year
- ✓ A summary report for the group of children assessed
- ✓ We will pay for the time required for a member of TA staff to complete the assessments

More about

INFANT LANGUAGE LINK

Our award-winning Infant Language Link package has the standardised assessment at its core, but it provides much more than just this for schools by:

- ✓ Enabling schools to track and support children from Reception to the end of Key Stage 1
- ✓ Offering in-package and webinar training to boost staff knowledge and skills
- ✓ Providing classroom strategies, small group interventions and one to one activities
- ✓ Giving access to our Help Desk support by email or phone every day when needed. This includes our speech and language therapy team for more specialist questions.

tinyurl.com/bdzys2ys

INFANT
LanguageLink

SUPPORTING YOUR TA



By **Sara Alston**, SEND and safeguarding trainer and consultant, SEA Inclusion & Safeguarding

The language of speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) or *communication and interaction needs* (both forms of label are in common use) is complex. These descriptors cover a wide range of difficulties and include expressive and receptive language needs and diagnoses. For many people, particularly those with little experience in this area, expressive language difficulties can be easier to identify and respond to as the child will struggle in some way to express their needs, ideas and interests. Identifying receptive language difficulties can be more challenging. There is often an assumption that if someone appears to understand that they do, especially when they appear to have good expressive language. However, this is not always true.

For teachers to support their TAs who work with children with SLCN, the first step must be to be clear about the child's profile and how they can be supported. Too often, support staff are left to work this out for themselves. This is often because the teachers themselves are unclear. Teachers and TAs need to work together, alongside speech and language therapists and other professionals where they are involved, to develop a clear understanding of each child's strengths and needs. This includes going beyond any diagnostic label. Two children with the same

diagnoses may have very different profiles and require different responses to meet them.

TAs working to support children with SLCN tend to work either through focused SALT sessions or in-class support. Both have pros and cons. However, the key to ensure any intervention is successful is effective communication and understanding of the children and their needs.

The best support within the classroom is connected with and embedded in classroom practice, so children are given opportunities to use and develop their skills in real contexts. This could be phonics teaching to support speech work, literacy lessons for sequencing and sentence structure and focused work to develop vocabulary across the curriculum. This can be further supported by pre-learning, where the TA or teacher introduces key vocabulary and the visuals to support recall and understanding. This way the child is familiar and confident with the language and context of what they are going to learn before the lesson.

For any of this, including the use of visuals, to be effective, TAs need to know and understand what is going to be taught and how. This means the sharing of planning is essential. The ideal is that TAs would be involved and part of the planning process, but in reality, this is rarely possible.

Nevertheless, the basics of planning can be shared through three key questions:

? What is the learning intention?

This needs to be focused and detailed. Not just maths or addition, but identifying the key methods, approaches or process to be used.

? What is the key vocabulary?

? What is the outcome?

This means the outcome for the child or children that the TA is working with, which may be different from the outcome for others.

“...TAs need to understand what they are teaching and be given time to prepare for the interventions and resources to be effective.”



I believe, that as far as possible, SEND support and interventions should take place in the classroom so that they are linked to what is being delivered as part of the wider curriculum. This avoids exclusion and the risk that the education of our most vulnerable children is outsourced to TAs as they attend more and more interventions and spend less time in the classroom. At this point there is a risk of interventions becoming 'outinterventions'.

However, there are some speech and language interventions that may need to happen outside the classroom as the pupil will need

quiet for focus, to be able to hear sounds or support their self-esteem. But it is important that this work connects to what is being taught in class, so that children are given the opportunity to practice the skills and vocabulary they are learning and integrate them into their classwork

Either way, TAs need to understand what they are teaching and be given time to prepare for the interventions and resources to be effective. Their time and space to deliver these interventions need to be respected. It is too easy for staff to be redeployed to cover absences or asked to deliver interventions

in inappropriate spaces e.g., corridors. We should prioritise the time and space for interventions to demonstrate their value to the staff asked to lead them and the children receiving them.

Further, we need to ensure staff are able to attend the training and modelling sessions offered by other professionals. Equally, the support needs to be connected to the wider curriculum, so that it directly supports children's access to learning. This requires the effective sharing of planning between teachers and their support staff.

Sara Alston is a practicing SENCo and an independent SEND and Safeguarding Consultant and Trainer with over 35 years teaching experience.

She is the co-author of **The Inclusive Classroom: A New Approach to Differentiation** (Bloomsbury, 2021). Her latest book, **Working Effectively with Your TA**, was published in February 2023.







Bloomsbury publishers are offering **25% discount** on both books with discount code ALSTON25 at: [Bloomsbury.com](https://www.bloomsbury.com) (offer valid until June 30th 2024).



25%
OFF

Advice from One TA to Another

So, you're a new TA? It can take some time to settle into the role and figure out where you fit in, but here are my top tips for finding your stride:

-  **Get to know the children with SLCN in your class:** Take time to read their files, understand their needs, and learn how they prefer to be supported.
-  **Stay energised and enthusiastic:** You'll need to bring lots of energy to keep your students excited and engaged in their learning.
-  **Reflect, learn, and move on:** Especially when you're left in charge and things go off the rails in a matter of minutes—those moments will happen!
-  **Build resilience:** It's an essential quality in this role.
-  **Be prepared:** Having access to lesson plans is crucial so you can plan your support for those who need it the most.
-  **Give it time with other staff:** Remember, they know each other well, and it will take time for you to build friendships and trust with them.

AND MY FAVOURITE TIP:

A lovely colleague of mine would put a bit of glitter on her inner wrist to remind herself to sparkle, even on the toughest days!



THE LINK COMMUNITY

The right SLCN resources are sometimes tricky to find – how much time have you spent online searching for the right resource to perhaps 'support a child with DLD' or 'an activity to help children understand similarities and differences'? Well search no further; by becoming a Link Community member you will be able to access a wealth of free resources, created by our speech and language therapists.

You will also get your ticket to The Link Live – **Speech and Language Day**.



Here's a sneak peek at one of the sessions: from our speech and language therapists, Juliet Leonard and Alison Fowle.



RHYTHM & RHYME TIME IN THE PRE-SCHOOL YEARS

"In this session we'll explore phonological awareness, how it develops in the early years and how we can support children to gain these key foundation skills in an EYFS setting. We'll also introduce you to Little Link, our new screening and universal intervention package for 3–5-year-olds and explain how we've included phonological awareness activities in the intervention."

Key takeaways:

-  Understand what phonological awareness is, and the impact for children who struggle to develop these key foundation skills.
-  Learn how you can support the development of phonological awareness in an EYFS setting.





Book Review

By Emma Price, speech and language therapist at Speech & Language Link

'That's my Story!' by Adam Power-Annard

'That's my Story!' is an interesting, informative, and easy to read book written for a varied audience including teachers, TAs, speech and language therapists, community group leaders, drama practitioners and theatre companies.

The objective of the book is to enable adults to engage and empower children, to use their own imagined stories to support the development of communication skills, confidence and well-being.

Power-Annard has created digestible, short paragraphs on key communication skills (illustrated with simple and engaging drawings), such as 'attention and listening', 'turn-taking', and how to use questioning such as 'I wonder ...' to encourage children to expand their ideas. He provides ideas and tips on how to aid the development of these skills via 'story telling' activities, as well as strategies that adults can implement to promote a safe and encouraging environment.

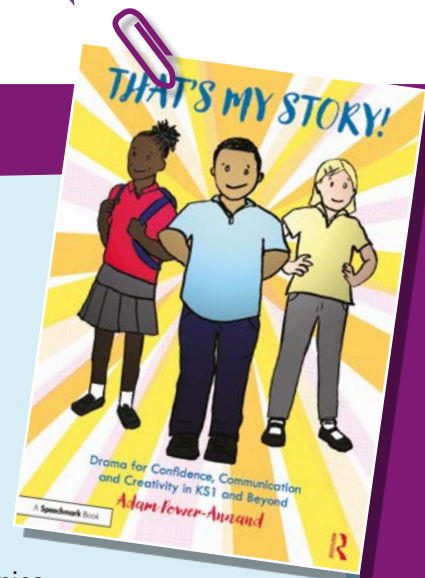
Though predominantly targeted at 5-7 years olds, the book provides adaptations to the strategies, games and resources so that they can be used to support children of any age.

I would recommend this book to anyone interested in using drama and story to help develop children's communication skills. Power-Annard not only gives you a multitude of practical 'hows' but also clearly outlines the essential 'whys'.

We have a copy of 'That's my story' to give away. Please email helpdesk@speechlink.co.uk

The winner will be drawn November 29th 2024

Get your copy from Routledge: <https://shorturl.at/fFydI>



Dates for your diary

OCTOBER 22ND
Inspiration SEND Network, Norwich

NOVEMBER 15TH
The Education People Show, Kent

NOVEMBER 21ST
The Link Live speech and language day

NOVEMBER 26TH
Our own Kate Freeman, will be speaking at The Sixth Annual Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Conference 2024, London

NOVEMBER 28TH
Surrey SEND Conference, Epsom



OUR FACEBOOK GROUP: SPEECH AND LANGUAGE SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS



Join the conversation with 3.7k members and receive weekly videos and posts from our speech and language team, take part in fun, short polls and surveys and share good practice.



Providing a **whole school** approach to supporting SLCN

Here's how we can help

Infant and Junior Language Link

- Schools use the universal online language screener to identify language difficulties in pupils aged 4-11 years
- Enable teachers and support staff to deliver planned and resourced language interventions for identified pupils

Speech Link

- Pupils are assessed for speech sound difficulties 4-8 years
- Support staff deliver planned and resourced speech intervention programmes for identified speech errors

School subscribers also benefit from:

- ✓ User training through video guides and termly webinars
- ✓ Online progress measures and provision maps to easily track progress
- ✓ Dynamic reporting, at individual, class, and whole-school levels, providing a clear overview of provision in just a few clicks

PLUS, schools can contact our friendly speech and language therapy Help Desk for advice and support five days a week!

There is no limit on the number of assessments or users



The Speech & Language Link
whole school approach

FREE TRIAL

Experience our speech and language school provision with a free 4-week trial

