

TheLink

SECONDARY

THE SPEECH & LANGUAGE MAGAZINE FOR SCHOOLS

THE LINK LIVE
SPEECH AND
LANGUAGE DAY
FREE TICKET
- PAGE 19

Success in the classroom

- for all learners with SLCN

ISSUE
4
2024

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WHY THE TEEN YEARS ARE AN
EXCELLENT TIME TO FOCUS ON
SPEECH AND LANGUAGE

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SPEAKER

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A warm welcome from the team at Speech & Language Link to this autumn issue of your Link magazine.

This issue is for you, the teacher, the SENCo, the TA/LSA/HLTA. We aim to provide you with opportunities to enhance your practice, gain more knowledge and ultimately develop your skills for supporting your students with SLCN.

The recently published report from the independent Oracy Education Commission tinyurl.com/3bdbad9v highlights two essential aspects of the relationship between SLCN and the recent focus on oracy. Firstly, that young people with SLCN are still in danger of being left behind if the speech and language building blocks of oracy are not

in place, and secondly that a focus on language development in teacher training is essential.

We really welcome this report, and its highlighting of the foundations of oracy. The Link magazine has always been about supporting these skills and providing opportunities for CPD in relation to SLCN. This term we have a feature on the **SLCN Toolkit, the CPD certified teacher training component of Secondary Language Link**. Find out more on page 8.

We also have a real-life story from **Niko** and his amazing journey as a non-English speaker with selective mutism (page 10) and part 2 of **Matt Bromley's** inclusive classroom feature (page 16). Our own specialist speech and language therapist, Juliet Leonard, provides an interesting

insight into the development of a teen's brain and why we need to grab this golden window of opportunity to work on speech and language. (Page 4).

Finally, at a time of extreme budget pressures our free Link Community introduces this year's **Link Live Speech and Language Day**, this year with parallel Secondary focused sessions. Sign up for free access to a whole day's online CPD on 21st November! (See page 19).

Have a great term and I hope to see you on November 21st.



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

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THE LINK COMMUNITY NEWS

Get your free Link Live ticket here

AUDITORY PROCESSING DISORDER

processing speech literacy SOUNDS SLCN glossary COMMUNICATION APD filtering



Taken from: The Ultimate Guide to SLCN
By **Sophie Mustoe-Playfair** and **Louise Burton**,
specialist speech and language therapists

Auditory Processing Disorder (APD) is a condition which affects how the brain interprets sounds. People with APD can hear sounds in the normal way, and there usually is not any hearing impairment, but they struggle with processing and making sense of the sounds they hear. This can impact on how well a person is able to focus their attention, particularly in noisy environments, and can cause difficulties understanding spoken language which arise from problems understanding the sounds of the message, rather than a difficulty understanding the meaning of the words.

APD is a lifelong condition, and it continues to affect people in adulthood. Despite this, many people find that the impact of the disorder lessens over time as they develop skills and strategies to manage their difficulties. APD can impact on the development of communication skills, academic attainment and social skills.

Prevalence

An estimated 5-7% of school-aged children are affected by APD, although the extent of their difficulties varies. Evidence suggests that it is diagnosed twice as often for boys than for girls. It is thought that up to 50% of children with dyslexia also have APD.

Difficulties include:

- Problems filtering out background noise
- Difficulty understanding what has been said
- 'Mishearing' auditory information, or misunderstanding messages
- Taking longer to process and respond to auditory information
- Poor auditory memory – particularly having difficulty retaining several spoken instructions at once
- Expressing themselves clearly when speaking or in writing
- Developing literacy skills including reading and spelling due to poor 'sound awareness'

Strategies

- 💡 Sit the student near the front of the class
- 💡 Ensure that you gain the student's attention before speaking
- 💡 Reduce ambient classroom noise as much as possible. Closing windows and doors will help to reduce noise from outside. Soft furnishings in the classroom can improve acoustics
- 💡 Use visual support including the written word
- 💡 Check understanding as you go along
- 💡 Speak clearly and at a slightly slower pace. Use intonation in your voice to highlight important points
- 💡 Provide instructions one step at a time and consider providing written instructions to follow multi-step processes



The Ultimate Guide to SLCN has been written by speech and language therapists to provide strategies and tips to help you support your SLCN learners.

Access this essential online handbook for free when you sign up to The Link Community here:



'BETWEEN BRAINS: Supporting SLCN in Tweens and Teens'



By **Juliet Leonard**, specialist speech and language therapist –
transcribed from The Link Live speech and language conference 2021

There has been a shocking rise in speech and language challenges with one-in-five pupils at primary and secondary schools struggling to talk and understand words.

For those secondary students, it's not too late. Key stage 3 is a crucial time for intervention for students with speech, language and communication needs.

Teenagers are a wonderful group to work with, but sometimes the changes that are occurring in their brains can be overlooked or perhaps misinterpreted. So, what is happening in brain function at this age and how can we support young people with inspiring and motivational, but functional interventions?

The changing brain

A child's brain is fully grown by the age of 6 and so the changes occurring in the adolescent brain are not about size, but about composition. Hormones start to kick in, sometimes as early as 10 and (aside from the obvious physical changes) the second largest change in brain development begins.

The brain has an 'edit' and an 'upgrade' and the neural connections become hardwired in a process called 'sprouting'. At the same time, neural links which are used frequently are sped up and those that are used less frequently start to die away which is called 'pruning'. The remaining neural links are upgraded, the signals are sped up and the brain begins to work more efficiently than it has ever worked before due to myelination (the fatty sheath around these neurones which speed up the signal).

There is something else that is special about this time. Over the adolescent years,

the brain gains speed but also loses flexibility and pliability, but there are some years in adolescence when the teen brain is still increasing in speed while maintaining pliability and agility. These golden years in adolescence are a crucial time for good brain training and developing processes and pathways which will be hard-wired by the end of the adolescent period. an excellent time to focus on speech and language, as sprouting occurs when ideas are reinforced.

"Teenagers are at a 'use it or lose it' stage and skills and processes are either hard-wired or lost (sprouted or pruned)."

There are lots more changes going on in a teen brain. An interesting study by Yurgelun-Todd showed that teenagers are not able to correctly read all the feelings in an adult's face. In the study, the same set of pictures was shown to teenagers and then to adults and asked them to interpret the emotions being expressed. The results were quite stark, teenagers misinterpreted those facial expressions in 50% of cases, where adults correctly

attributed them in 100% of cases. Teenagers were wrongly thinking that adult facial expressions conveyed shock, fear, anger (which would of course lead to misunderstandings) and explains the reactions we sometimes see from teenagers are actually due to neurological phenomenon rather than 'mood', 'just being difficult' and 'typical teenager behaviour'.

Given that this is such a time of turmoil and change, is it a good time to be focussing on developing speech language and communication? The answer is YES, absolutely! Students are at a 'use it or lose it' stage and skills and processes are either hard-wired or lost (sprouted or pruned). We need to grab this opportunity to hardwire the well-used pathways which will provide the student with skills that will be useful, can be generalised, and that will set them up for adulthood.

HOW CAN WE HELP?

- ✓ Language tasks should be directly related to the student's experiences to increase engagement and enable the best chance of them generalising skills.
- ✓ Give the student frequent decision-making opportunities that put them in the position of leader, especially regarding topics where they can be the 'expert'.
- ✓ Provide space for independence, allow time for spoken problem-solving, personal reflection and identification of strengths and needs.
- ✓ Focus on functional, new skills must be useful and natural for the student to be able to take them and put them into practice.
- ✓ Use an evidence-based speech and language support programme such as **Secondary Language Link**.

Watch Juliet's complete video presentation from The Link Live Speech and Language Day here:



MAXIMISING YOUR IMPACT

as a SENDCO



By **Gary Aubin**, Secondary teacher, former primary and secondary SENDCO and former secondary Head of Year.

Gary also authors the SENDMattersUK blog and is The Education Endowment Foundation's SEND Associate.

JOIN GARY AT
THE LINK LIVE
SPEECH AND LANGUAGE DAY
THIS NOVEMBER.

See page 19 for the full
programme and ticket
information.

It's really hard to be a SENDCO. Pressures come from all over the place. Progress is often hard to see.

It's also an absolute joy and privilege. It's a particular joy when we know that our work has impact. What might that impactful work look like, and how might we make it happen?

Prioritising effectively

If I asked 10 SENDCOs to write down some of the highest-impact tasks they could do as SENDCO, they might all write different lists.

There would likely be some common themes though – tasks that support other colleagues, that develop teachers, that support TAs to have impact, that guide leaders to work inclusively, that build trust between the school and its families, that help colleagues support students with complex needs.

There might be another common theme – the theme that these are aspects of the role that they spend not enough time doing, due to the other pressing (and sometimes legally binding) aspects of the SENDCO role. Through no fault of SENDCOs, the highest-impact work doesn't always get done.

Our ability to ensure these high-impact tasks get done, in the context of these other very real pressures, is fundamental for ensuring impact. Where we feel unable to focus on high-impact tasks, we should be working this through with line managers and headteachers – it's in everyone's interest that we do so.

Working through others

Whether you work with a Key Stage 1 lead or a head of science, their remit will be to lead their area for 100% of their cohort. To help every student, every budding scientist, to reach their learning potential and to be happy and successful in school.

Their remit won't be to lead their areas for 82% of students, then to outsource to the SENDCO for the rest. But, as we know, meeting the needs of students with SEND can be complex, and hard for other leaders to do alone, hence why we have SENDCOs.

A SENDCO's job is not to do a leadership colleague's job for them; but it's also not just to state 'every leader's a leader of SEND' and expect them to get on with it. A SENDCO's job should be to help those colleagues to understand what inclusive leadership might look like in their area, and to support their delivery of it. More often than not, this provides a win for you both.

For instance, a joint piece of work between a SENDCO and head of science around effective pre-teaching of vocabulary might support greater curriculum access for students, especially those with developmental language disorder – a 'win' for both leaders.

For instance, a joint piece of work between a SENDCO and Key Stage 3 lead about using visuals to support understanding and communicate expectations might lead to more students self-regulating effectively and being ready for their learning – a 'win' for both leaders.

More importantly though, these scenarios are a win for those students who might be dependent on these types of support the most.

Making teaching 'the thing'

I don't think our SEND world always incentivises us towards a focus on teaching and learning. When I first became a SENDCO, I focused on teaching assistants, interventions, meeting with families, working with various external professionals and completing various forms. All important aspects of the role and all things that need to happen, but also all things that can't stand in the way of a focus on teaching and learning.

If the teaching meets needs, we need fewer interventions. If the teaching meets needs, families are happy and may require less of our time in meetings. If the teaching meetings needs, fewer forms might need to be completed.

We know that teachers can be supported to develop their practice – it happens in schools throughout the country, every day. We know that there are few things more important in education than the decisions a teacher makes in their planning, in their delivery and in how they reflect on and adapt their approaches based on how students are progressing.

Our work as SENDCOs needs to reflect this, therefore. In our day-to-day routines, taking the long way back to our office so we can pop our head into a lesson we don't normally get to see. In our support for teachers, which needs to feel open, two-way, regular and without judgement. In our delivery of training, which needs to meet staff where they are in their practice, needs to develop certain teaching techniques and needs to last longer than single twilights, so approaches can be truly embedded.

Most of this I have learned the hard way, through my own failings. Some of it I have learned through having the fortune to meet great SENDCOs, in my work with Whole Education in relation to SEND school improvement.

The SENDCO role might be as hard as it's ever been – but our ability to prioritise well, lead other leaders and develop our teaching colleagues might just help us to remain impactful in these challenging times.

A SENDCO's job is not to do a leadership colleague's job for them; but it's also not just to state 'every leader's a leader of SEND' and expect them to get on with it.



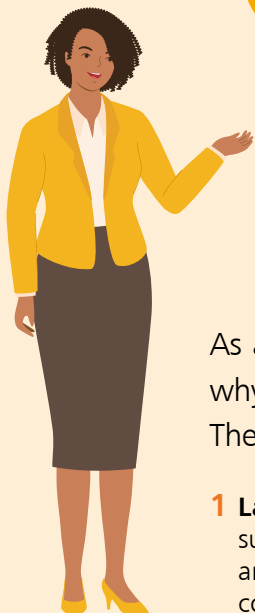
Gary Aubin is the author of *The Lone SENDCO*, a handbook of 300 questions and answers for busy SENDCOs. www.senbooks.co.uk/the-lone-sendco

His second book, *The Parent's Guide to SEND*, is being released in early 2025.

SLCN TOOLKIT



?



“Are you a teacher who is struggling to support your students’ language and communication needs?”





By
editor

As a secondary school teacher, TA, HLTA or SENCo there could be several reasons why you feel you are not managing your students’ difficulties as well as you want to. These may include:

- 1 Lack of specialised training:** You are a subject expert, rather than trained in speech and language development and are not confident with identifying and supporting communication difficulties.
- 2 Complex and advanced curriculum:** You know some students are overwhelmed with the subject-specific vocabulary and abstract concepts that the secondary curriculum requires, but are unsure how to go about supporting this.
- 3 Time constraints:** If only you had more time to adapt lessons or provide extra support for students who struggle with communication... but you don’t.
- 4 Lack of resources:** Your school has limited access to speech and language therapy and staff training can be expensive and difficult to facilitate.
- 5 Student reluctance:** You’re aware of how self-conscious some of your students are about their language difficulties, and their reluctance to participate in activities that could improve their skills limits the effectiveness of the support currently in place.

Here’s how **Secondary Language Link** can help you successfully support SLCN in the classroom.

Secondary Language Link is a standardised assessment and intervention package used to identify and support SLCN and includes:

-  Standardised, online assessment, used to universally screen students at transition with additional tracking of any young person where intervention is recommended
-  Universal and targeted support designed with student engagement in mind
-  A range of built-in progress measures enabling you to track the impact of interventions on each of your student’s language and communication skills
-  Communication Contracts to enable students to take responsibility for their own learning, promoting self-advocacy and independence

It also offers an online teacher training resource, **The SLCN Toolkit**, designed to equip you with the knowledge and skills to identify students at risk of SLCN and understand the impact of communication difficulties on both learning and throughout life. The Toolkit promotes inclusive teaching practices across the curriculum, helping students with SLCN achieve successful outcomes in secondary school.



“Let's take a deep dive...”

The SLCN Toolkit is an online teacher training resource, included with your Secondary Language Link subscription, that looks at ways in which teachers can support the learning and achievement of students with language and communication difficulties.

Comprising of two video-based training modules, it's suitable for all subject teachers and support staff, promotes inclusion across the curriculum and can be easily slotted into a staff CPD programme. Not only that, but it is also CPD-accredited and includes self-audit tools to help staff develop their practice and their confidence.

The SLCN Toolkit can be completed individually or in groups.

The Teacher Self-Evaluation Questionnaire has been designed to produce an audit of skills and knowledge throughout the school. This can form the baseline for the continuing professional development of staff within the school's development planning.

Although the toolkit may enhance the existing knowledge of SEN practitioners in schools, it aims to support the CPD of mainstream teachers.

Two training modules help staff to develop their understanding of language and communication needs and learn practical skills and strategies for how to identify and support students. They include best practice guidance from real teachers and students with SLCN talking about their experiences.

PART 1 may also benefit teaching assistants and learning support assistants

PART 2 will be beneficial for educational practitioners with responsibility for whole class teaching

Throughout the training there are reflective questions to encourage teachers to think about existing practice.



Our evidence-based high-quality teaching strategies, accompany the training along with a huge variety of supporting classroom resources. These include task management boards, story and sentence planners and subject specific graphic organisers.

To build strong foundations for their students' learning, teachers need to consider the individual needs of their learners and know how to create impactful language-rich, communication friendly classrooms. Secondary Language Link can help!

If your school is a Secondary Language Link subscriber, ask your SENCo for your own login and get immediate access to the training, resources and your students' assessment results.

If not, you can try Secondary Language Link free, for 4 weeks, and explore how it can help your school support the learning and achievement of students with SLCN.

**FREE
TRIAL
SIGN UP**

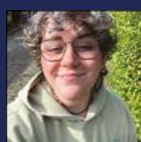


SECONDARY
LanguageLink

JUST LIKE US



Teachers thought I was shy but I was struggling with selective mutism – and being in the closet.



By **Niko Thompson** (he/him), a Just Like Us ambassador

Starting school felt like being on a different planet. At home we only spoke German, then suddenly I started primary school and everyone around me spoke English. There was one other German-speaking student, but we were swiftly separated, probably to encourage us to make friends and learn the language. It just made everything worse. Was this what made me so quiet? Was this why my autism was missed during primary and secondary education?

I spent three years at school before I spoke to a teacher. A girl in my class started calling me 'mouse' because I rarely spoke and, when I did, it came out as a high-pitched squeak. Three years of silence but, still, I was just labelled 'shy'.

In year 5, a kind teacher gave me a red and green card to indicate whether I was able to speak that day. Year 5 was the best year of primary school, but staff did not suggest there was anything wrong or offer any additional support beyond this. When I entered secondary school, the card was ignored.

Selective mutism (SM) is an anxiety disorder where individuals lose the ability to speak in certain social situations. It often looks like an extreme 'freeze response' around people the individual is less comfortable with. Although SM and autism share overlapping traits, there is no direct link between them. However, autism can be a risk factor for developing SM as it results in extreme anxiety or phobia surrounding social interactions.

I seemed so advanced in reading, and on the occasions in which I would speak, I used a far more advanced vocabulary as a result, masking my developmental problems and justifying the label of 'shyness'. Hyperlexia is a condition, often associated with autism (though not

limited to it), where a child possesses a highly advanced reading level and a fascination with language. It may seem incongruous to have selective mutism and hyperlexia. In actuality, the main symptoms of hyperlexia also include difficulties in understanding spoken language, initiating conversations, and other traits which disturb communication, such as literal thinking and echolalia. As a hyperlexic child, I was a voracious reader. I filled the two ceiling high bookcases in my room, books stacked in two rows per shelf, and I had read every single one of them. I could come home from school, and dive straight into another world, pretending I was a spy or a wizard. Someone who was different but wasn't made fun of for it. My teachers were just pleased I was such a keen reader, but they ignored everything else which pointed to my being autistic.

I've known I was LGBT+ since I was 13. By that age, the strong sense of justice and black and white thinking so typical of autistic people had developed. I knew right and wrong, and, to me, there was nothing in between. Combined with my finally fading selective mutism (forced away by increasingly intolerant adults in my life who thought I just needed a 'push' to get over my nerves), daily debates at school challenging peers' notions of queerness became a very exhausting norm.

As I didn't know I was autistic, it felt as if the only possible reason I couldn't make friends at school was because I was queer. That was the only thing different about me, right? I couldn't pick up on whether someone had been hurt by things I was saying, so those debates about social politics felt like arguments to others. If I had known I was autistic at that point, all of this would have made sense.

I stopped being 'shy' and became 'combative', which teachers continually attributed to my LGBT+ identity. Growing up LGBT+ felt more alienating than it needed to be. I came out as transgender in stages (over text, phone call, and then in-person) because of anxiety about speaking the words. I wasn't scared about people finding out, I just didn't know how to say it properly. When I told my dad, the conversation was two sentences long.

Struggling to communicate meant I didn't access mental health support until a breaking point at a new sixth form. I thought a positive space for queer people would solve my problems, but quickly found the damage was already done.

After years of confusion, I was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder at 21. During my assessment, my dad revealed he thought being bilingual delayed my language processing, but this is actually a common myth.

My primary school reports repeatedly stated how quiet and shy I was. In reality, I had serious communication problems. I couldn't communicate my needs, start conversations, or speak in group settings.

In secondary school, teachers attributed my problems to my LGBT+ identity. I once got in trouble for a situation caused by a communication issue, and the deputy head told me he would "expect this behaviour from a boy, but never from a girl," inadvertently affirming my gender, but still suggesting that queerness meant bad behaviour. At that point, I had cut my hair and was dressing as a boy, so if he didn't know I was trans, he had probably assumed I was a lesbian, and that whatever 'masculinity' came with these identities resulted in trouble.

Being LGBT+ and having speech and language difficulties will continuously affect each other and are both major risk factors for future mental health issues. It creates a double disadvantage; you must fight discrimination daily with an atypical communication style.

The right support means a child can thrive, but that support can only come if you are educated enough to spot the signs of differences like autism and be LGBT+ affirming.



ASK A THERAPIST



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

Q.

How should I handle feeling judged by a family that believes I should be doing more to support their child's SLCN?

A.

We know how important it is to include families and students in their support plan and the value of any feedback and advice they can provide, as they know their child's needs best. However, there are times when more challenging situations arise, such as when a family dictates what you should be doing or expresses frustration regarding the frequency, duration, or type of support you are providing.

So how do you handle this situation?

First, take a moment to pause! When a parent strongly prescribes the type of support to provide, it often reflects their deep anxiety about their child's well-being and progress. If you can look beyond the initial personal hurt, you may find an opportunity for understanding.

So, what else can you do?

Align your goals from the start

Families may have specific expectations about what 'support' looks like; 1:1, twice-weekly individual sessions or a bespoke timetable. Help parents to see the value of what you are offering by giving robust reasoning. E.g., bespoke visual classroom strategies, rather than individual sessions outside of the classroom, may be the best way to support their child to access learning. This is a highly functional and valid reason for considering this support strategy.

Own what's yours to own

The shift from primary to secondary school is enormous, not just for the student, but for families too. Perhaps the family forged close ties and support with school staff and now they feel they don't have that level of understanding and help. Or perhaps the family feel let down by previous experiences at primary and that life feels like one constant battle. It's important to listen carefully and try to understand, whilst clarifying what you can do to help within the bounds of your role.






Involve the student

Supporting SLCN in secondary schools is all about fostering self-help, awareness and independence skills. It is therefore vital that the students themselves are involved in discussions about how to help them best. Involving students as well as families ensures that everyone can share their views, that they are all on the same page and that the student's wishes and motivators are at the centre of any support plan.

Trust your skills

You have training and experience in working with students. You can feel assured that you are working hard to support the child in the best way you can. It is not a contradiction to be confident in your skills, but also keen to learn and understand more, this openness to learning and reflection is what makes a good practitioner a great one.

Key Takeaways

-  Explain what you are offering, and why
-  Listen carefully and consider parents' feelings
-  Clarify your role and responsibilities
-  Put the student at the centre
-  Reflect on your practice and access CPD

Don't forget your obligations under UK GDPR to do your due diligence.

Is your school looking at using a new EdTech service?



By **Paul Strout**, managing director of GDPR Assist

Schools have a vast array of technology available to them to support their pupils' learning and development. Where that technology is provided as a cloud-based tool, schools should be mindful of the data sharing with external organisations which occurs and ensure that the sharing and processing by the school and the supplier doesn't introduce any unnecessary risk for their children or their staff.

As Claire Archibald of Derbyshire County Council's Children's Services Department says:

"A school wouldn't hand over printed details of all their pupils on request from a new supplier without first asking some serious questions, and yet schools often miss this important step when providing the data digitally to a new EdTech vendor."

Under UK GDPR schools have an obligation to conduct a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) when the processing is "likely to result in a high risk to the rights and freedoms [of people]". There are two examples which are of particular relevance to schools:

- Using systems or processes which are new to the organisation, and
- Processing personal data of vulnerable people

Given that children should always be considered as being vulnerable people, schools should be doing their due diligence and conducting a DPIA prior to implementing new technology which will be processing pupil data.

Speech Link Multimedia is committed to helping our schools with their obligations around DPIAs. Our Data Protection Officer, Paul Strout of GDPR Assist UK Ltd, says, "As a processor acting under the instruction of the school, we ensure that our contractual terms include the protections a school should expect to see under UK GDPR. Any school is also welcome, indeed encouraged, to talk to us about any specific questions they might have".

He says that common questions include:

- ❓ Do we have a Data Processing Agreement? (We do! Within our published terms)
- ❓ Do we transfer data out of the UK? (No, all processing is within the UK)
- ❓ Do we encrypt data? (We do – both when it is being moved between the school and us, and also when it is being stored by us)
- ❓ Do we use any non-UK suppliers to process data? (No, we don't)
- ❓ What security certifications do we have? (We hold Cyber Essentials Plus, and our UK hosting provider is certified to ISO 27001)

Schools in Derbyshire who utilise our Speech & Language Link products have benefitted from the support of Claire and her colleagues to conduct a thorough DPIA. *"It was refreshing to work with Speech & Language Link as they were so prepared to engage with me in the process and explain their processing."*

We're proud of the work we have done to demonstrate to schools that we are deserving of their trust.



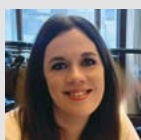
READ PAUL'S EXTENDED BLOG HERE:



For simple, clear GDPR help and advice get in touch with Paul at:
gdprassist.co.uk

Supporting students who **STAMMER**

in the classroom,
a guide for school staff



By **Sarah Friend**, clinical lead speech and language therapist for stammering and school aged language

st-st-st

tr-tr-trrr

bu-bb-bu

Stammering (or stuttering) is a difference in how people speak. Up to 8% of young people will stammer; that's around 2 in every classroom!

As a teacher, you can make a real difference to a student's school experience by understanding more about stammering and creating an inclusive environment for them. This won't just help the student who stammers; everyone in the class will benefit from an environment where communication is encouraged and supported.

What does stammering look like?

A student who stammers might: repeat sounds or words, prolong sounds, or have a silent block where no sound comes out. You may also notice some additional tension in their face or body, or that they make extra movements during moments of stammering (e.g., jerking their head). However, everyone stammers differently, and it's also very normal for stammering to fluctuate. Students can stammer less in certain situations, and more in others.

What impact can it have?

When we think about stammering, we don't just think about the way the words get stuck, but also how it affects students' thoughts, feelings and behaviour. This may be less obvious. A student who stammers might:

- ☹ not put their hand up even if they know the answer or keep quiet if they haven't understood something rather than ask for help.
- ☹ try to hide their stammer by changing words, saying less or avoiding speaking altogether.
- ☹ worry about certain speaking situations, such as reading aloud.
- ☹ worry about being teased or bullied for sounding different.

Not everyone who stammers will feel the same; some students may not be bothered by their stammer, whereas others may feel embarrassed or worried about how they talk. How a student feels about their stammer may change over time.

What can teachers do to help?

Every student who stammers is unique and will want different support. The best thing you can do is to speak to the student privately in an open and sensitive way and ask if there is anything they would like you and other teachers to do to help them feel more confident in the classroom.

When the student is speaking

- ✓ Give them lots of time to say what they want to say: don't interrupt or finish their sentences
- ✓ Slow down your own speech to show all students there is plenty of time to talk
- ✓ Don't give the student advice on their speech, such as telling them to slow down or take a breath. While this is well-meaning, this may make them feel more self-conscious or anxious
- ✓ Focus on "what" the student is saying rather than "how". It is important the content of their message is focused on
- ✓ Show the student you are listening by maintaining natural eye contact, nodding and smiling. Remain calm, kind and approachable
- ✓ Most importantly, treat the student who stammers the same way you treat other students; no one likes to be treated differently or have unnecessary attention drawn to them

Changes in the classroom

- ✓ Wait for the student to volunteer to answer a question, rather than calling on them. Being put on the spot to speak can put pressure on the student, which may make them more anxious and more likely to stammer. However, continue to give them the same opportunities to speak as everyone else in the class if they do volunteer to talk!
- ✓ Be flexible with speaking tasks. Activities such as answering the register, reading aloud, or doing a presentation in front of the class can be very difficult for a student who stammers. Consider alternatives that

may help, such as allowing the class to respond non-verbally to the register (e.g., with a hand up), or reading in pairs rather than individually

- ✓ Allow 'thinking time' before having to respond to questions, and encourage the whole class to take their time when answering
- ✓ Students who stammer may find it hard to initiate to ask for help, so ensure you check in with all students that they have understood, to provide the opportunity to ask for help

Teasing and bullying

This is an important issue and can have long term consequences for a student's confidence and emotional wellbeing.

- ✓ If you suspect a student is being teased or bullied, you must act immediately. It is not acceptable to tease or bully someone for the way that they talk
- ✓ Discuss with the student individually about what support they would like
- ✓ Discuss with the whole class (e.g., in PSHE lessons) about respecting differences in how we all speak and encouraging patience and kindness to each other. This will indirectly support the student who stammers without singling them out to their peers

Reasonable adjustments

Stammering can be considered a disability under the Equality Act and the Disability Discrimination Act. Therefore, schools have a responsibility to make reasonable adjustments for students who stammer if they need them. This can include changes to oral presentations or other assessments, such as the option to deliver the presentation individually, or with additional time.

There are some brilliant resources available on the STAMMA website for further guidance and ideas for reasonable adjustments teachers can make for students who stammer.



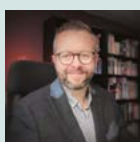
Other resources

- [A Guide to Stammering: For Teachers](#) | STAMMA tinyurl.com/2nyhstmr
- [My tips for supporting pupils who stammer](#) | STAMMA tinyurl.com/yc7tknn8
- [Teachers – The Michael Palin Centre for Stammering](#) tinyurl.com/y3fpkcbc
- [Action for Stammering Children](#) actionforstammeringchildren.org/support/support-for-schools/
- [Barnsley Children's SaLT](#) tinyurl.com/5zupe8n2
- [Stammering | Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust](#) tinyurl.com/2utwcks9

If you speak to the young person and they report that their stammering is impacting on their confidence with communicating, or how they are feeling about themselves as a communicator, it is recommended that you refer to SaLT for further support.

IT'S NOT ABOUT ABILITY:

Mitigating the language demands of the classroom



By **Matt Bromley**, education journalist, author and advisor

We welcome back Matt Bromley and part two of his 'It's not about ability' series. Here he explores ways to ensure that language and communication needs don't limit students' potential in the classroom and provides strategies for reducing language demands to foster successful learners.

(Missed Part 1? Read in The Link Secondary, issue 3, online at: tinyurl.com/3xka76ps)

Part 2:

In my teaching, I've discovered that, to help students with SLCN engage in classroom discussions and question-and-answer sessions, I need to teach them how to talk and work in groups. To that end:

I always provide plenty of opportunities for students to talk in class, to a partner, to a small group, to adults, and to the whole class. I also scaffold questions to build student confidence and give students time to process questions and instructions, building in 'thinking time'.

I'm also always cognisant of the length and complexity of the language I use with students, and I carefully consider the range and level of questions students understand.

I also check for understanding frequently, sometimes involving other adults in the class where relevant.

What's more, I encourage students to engage in discussions with peers. To help facilitate this, I model and scaffold where needed and I explicitly teach students how to recognise when they need help and how to ask for it.

Explicitly teach vocabulary

For many years, I have sought to fill gaps in my SLCN students' vocabularies to ensure that they can access the same ambitious curriculum as their peers.

Influenced by the work of Isabel Beck and Averil Coxhead, I identify the 'tier 2' words that I use in my teaching and explicitly teach those words before I use them in context.



4 STEPS










To achieve this, I utilise a 4-step sequence:

- 1 I provide students with a rich language environment
- 2 I carefully select high-frequency words for explicit teaching
- 3 I develop the number of words my students know and their understanding of relationships between words and the contexts in which words can be used
- 4 I provide multiple opportunities to hear and use new vocabulary

In terms of point 1, I've found that high quality interactions occur when I collaborate with students on a task and my strategies are highly tuned to the student's capabilities and motivations. In other words, I try to be responsive to the student's intentions, I focus on spontaneous learning, and I provide opportunities for the student's feedback.

Discussion is a key feature of this approach and I'm keen to ensure I use of a variety of questions to help develop and extend student's thinking.

Influenced by the *EEF, here are some of the other techniques I use to build SLCN students' word power:









-  **Tuning in:** listening carefully to what is being said and observing what the student is doing
-  **Showing genuine interest:** giving whole attention, eye contact, and smiling and nodding
-  **Asking students to elaborate:** "I really want to know more about this."
-  **Re-capping:** "So you think that..."
-  **Clarifying ideas:** "So you think we should wear coats in case it rains?"
-  **Using encouragement to extend thinking:** "You have thought really hard about your tower, what can you do next?"
-  **Suggesting:** "You might want to try doing it like this."
-  **Reminding:** "Don't forget that you said we should wear coats in case it rains."
-  **Asking open questions:** 'How did you?', 'Why does this...?', 'What happens next?'

In terms of points 2-4, in my classroom, and as I say above, I tend to start by teaching 'tier 2' words which are those words which appear commonly in written texts but not in spoken language. They are not subject-specific terminology nor necessarily complex words but are words that are vital to students' ability to access the school curriculum and to them being able to demonstrate their understanding.

Once I have identified these words in my teaching, I expose my students to them on multiple occasions and in different contexts.

Scaffold questions to build student confidence and give students time to process questions and instructions, building in 'thinking time'.

In her book, *Bringing Words to Life*, Beck offers this possible teaching sequence for doing just this:**

-  Read a sentence in which the word appears
-  Show students the word and get them to say it out loud
-  Discuss possible meanings of the word
-  Identify any parts of the word that may be familiar (e.g., Greek or Latin roots, common prefixes and suffixes)
-  Re-read the sentence with the word in it to detect any contextual clues
-  Explicitly explain the meaning of the word through definition and the use of synonyms
-  Provide several other examples of the word being used in context
-  Ask students to use the word in sentences of their own

The Secondary Language Link SLCN Toolkit aims to support inclusion across the school and promotes Quality First Teaching to support attainment of all students. Find out how on page 9.



* <https://tinyurl.com/mrtp36a>

** <https://tinyurl.com/22fybf7j>

welcome to

TheLink

SECONDARY

HOW DLD AWARE ARE YOU?

In the previous issue of The Link, we conducted a survey to gauge your awareness of DLD. If you're wondering, "What is DLD?" you're not alone. 17% of the teaching staff surveyed were unaware, and an additional 7% had heard of it, but weren't sure what it was.

Most respondents (61%) had received little to no training on SEN/SLCN with their learning experiences varying from half a day to "a few lectures" or "one assignment."

Developmental language disorder (DLD) is a life-long condition which affects an estimated two pupils in every mainstream classroom, making it more common than autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Yet despite this, it is *little* recognised and understood, but it's *hugely* impactful. Not only can it make it significantly difficult for a person to express language (both oral and written) but it can severely reduce their ability to understand language.



FOR THE FULL RESULTS OF OUR SURVEY AND HOW TO GET MORE HELP TO SUPPORT DLD VISIT:



*A big thank you to the 103 teaching staff who completed our survey. Congratulations to Vicky Cook who was randomly selected to win our Speech & Language Link travel mug and Ultimate Guide to SLCN book.

SEND data from the DfE School Census 2023-24

NEW

KEY DATA SHOWS:

That **1,673,205 /18.4%** of children in England have some kind of special educational need (up from 17.3% in 2023)

434,354/4.8% pupils have an EHCP (up from 4.3% in 2023)

In mainstream secondary, the number of students with an EHCP has increased by 14.5%

The most common type of need for those with an EHCP is autistic spectrum disorder and for those with SEN support continues to be **speech, language and communication needs.**

Dates for your diary

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

The Link Live Speech & language day 2024



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

BROUGHT
TO YOU BY
THE LINK
COMMUNITY

The Speech & Language Link
whole school approach



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



More info: shorturl.at/PysGB



Secondary Language Link helps build communication skills for life. It provides:

- 👍 **Online standardised assessments** to be used universally in Year 7
- 👍 **Individual profiles and class reports** to identify areas of strength and need
- 👍 **Targeted and resourced immersive intervention groups** designed with student engagement in mind
- 👍 **Communication Contracts** to enable students to take responsibility for their own learning
- 👍 **The SLCN Toolkit teacher training** for all subject teachers
- 👍 **Built-in progress measures** enabling you to track the impact of interventions
- 👍 **Package support** via webinar overviews, user guides and access to our Speech & Language Link Help Desk



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Find out more here
tinyurl.com/2fuvnsz4



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