

# TheLink

## PRIMARY



**CARBON  
BALANCED  
PAPER**

[www.carbonbalancedpaper.com](http://www.carbonbalancedpaper.com)

CBP030469

ISSUE  
**32**  
2025

THE SPEECH & LANGUAGE MAGAZINE FOR SCHOOLS

### SLCN IN THE CLASSROOM

How do you know? What can you do?  
Find out more inside.



The Link Community is an  
ERA Awards finalist.

Check out the membership  
benefits on page 17.

Brought to you by: Speech & Language Link - visit [speechandlanguage.link](https://speechandlanguage.link)



**THE IMPACT OF 'CAMOUFLAGING'  
ON PUPILS WITH SLCN**

Page 4



**BUILDING A RELATIONSHIP WITH  
A CHILD WITH SLCN**

Page 8



**SELECTIVE MUTISM – TIPS AND  
FREE RESOURCES TO HELP YOU  
SUPPORT SM**

Page 10

# CONTENTS

3

**The Link Live 2025 – tickets now available**



4-5

**Understanding camouflaging**

By Yin Collighan, specialist speech and language therapist

6

**One TA to another**

By Claire Chambers, editor – The Link

8-9

**Follow the empathy road**

By Ginny Bootman, SEND and relationship specialist, keynote speaker and author

10-11

**Selective mutism**

By Lucy Nathanson, child therapist, selective mutism specialist, bestselling author and international speaker

12-13

**Forest School**

By Juliet Leonard, specialist speech and language therapist

14-15

**Top 5 questions from the HelpDesk**

Answered by the Speech & Language Link therapy team

16-17

**Ask a therapist**

By specialist speech and language therapist, Alison Fowle

18-19

**The Link Community**

## Editor's Letter



Dear SENCo,

How can you tell if a pupil in your classroom has speech and language difficulties? And once you have, what steps can you take to support them? These are the questions we aim to explore in every issue of The Link magazine.

Perhaps there's an even more important question to consider: **why** is identification and support so vital?

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) puts it plainly:

*"Communication difficulties put children at greater risk of poor literacy, mental health issues, and poorer employment outcomes in adulthood."\**

If that isn't reason enough to invest in identifying and supporting pupils with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), then what is? As a SENCo, you and your team are in a unique position to change life trajectories—especially for those children who may otherwise slip through the net.

**So, what's inside this issue?**

We're shining a spotlight on selective mutism (SM)—a condition still often misunderstood, its name can misleadingly imply that children are choosing not to speak, when in fact, it's an anxiety-based difficulty. On page 10, child therapist and SM specialist, **Lucy Nathanson**, shares practical tips for supporting these pupils.

Have you ever been surprised by the results of a speech and language screening? Many schools using our Language Link assessment discover that children who appear to be coping well are, in fact, masking their difficulties. Page 4 explores the concept of **camouflaging**, particularly among girls, and offers insights that may challenge how we interpret what we see in the classroom.

Also included are our popular features: **Ask a therapist** (page 16), where our specialists respond to questions from schools and **One TA to another** (page 6), a space dedicated to sharing practical tips, stories, and strategies drawn from real-life classroom experience.

Finally, we're thrilled to share that our SLCN resource hub, **The Link Community**, is an ERA Awards finalist in the *Free SEND Resource* category! With over 3,550 members (and growing), it's packed with free tools, podcasts, and practical resources. Turn to page 17 for more information about member benefits.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue as much as we've loved creating it. Here's to a summer term full of learning, laughter, and growth!

Claire Chambers

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

\* <https://tinyurl.com/f54n2y7u>



Pupils enjoying a  
**'NATTER IN NATURE'**  
page 12



@SpeechLink

@speechandlanguage.bsky.social

**speechandlanguage.link**

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



# The Link Live Speech & Language Day

# LinkLive

3

BACK FOR 2025

Join our one day, online conference for practical insights, fresh ideas and inspiring perspectives delivered by the experts for you to take back to your setting. Free for Link Community members!

GRAB YOUR  
**FREE**  
TICKETS HERE!

>>>

SCAN ME



## First speakers now confirmed



**ABIGAIL HAWKINS**

**SEN consultant, author  
and advocate**

Founder of SENSible SENCO

Find out more about  
Abigail here:

[www.sensiblesenco.org.uk](http://www.sensiblesenco.org.uk)

### EVENT DETAILS

**Date:** Thursday,  
27th November 2025

**Location:** Online

**Time:** 9:00-16:15

**Cost:** Free for Link  
Community members



**MIKEY AKERS**

**Founder of  
Mikey's Wish Foundation,**  
raising awareness of  
apraxia of speech

Find out more about  
Mikey's work here:  
[www.tinyurl.com/yc2csu9f](http://www.tinyurl.com/yc2csu9f)



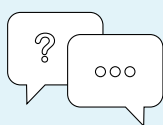
**ALI NEAL**

**Occupational  
therapist**  
Founder of School  
Sensory Solutions  
Find out more  
about Ali here:

[www.tinyurl.com/3de475jb](http://www.tinyurl.com/3de475jb)



**8 EXPERT  
SPEAKERS**



**LIVE Q&A  
SESSIONS**



**ACCREDITED  
BY CPD UK**



**FREE FOR THE  
LINK COMMUNITY**

# Understanding

## CAMOUFLAGING

in speech, language and communication needs (SLCN)

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



Social interactions can be particularly challenging for those with SLCN. A common but often overlooked phenomenon in SLCN is 'camouflaging'. In this article, we'll look at what this is, its impact on those with SLCN and how we can support our pupils who camouflage.

### What is camouflaging in SLCN?

Camouflaging in SLCN refers to strategies used to hide communication difficulties, often through masking or compensation. Children may do this consciously to fit in or unconsciously due to limited awareness. It can involve covering up challenges to appear more capable in social situations, impacting their confidence and wellbeing.

### Camouflage behaviours include:

- **Use of specific conversational tools:** Pupils may simplify their language to avoid complex vocabulary, tricky sounds or difficult sentence structures. They might use stock phrases to maintain conversation or steer discussions toward familiar topics where they feel more confident. They may close conversations that don't draw attention to their difficulties when they wish to stop talking e.g., "Oh, I feel tired today."
- **Behaviours:** The class clown may be using humour to conceal the fact they didn't understand what the adult said. A child may look defiant or shy in the classroom; in fact, they are trying to avoid speaking. Children might use visual context and watch others to work out what to do
- **Lack of participation in the classroom:** A pupil may not put up their hand to answer questions due to fear of making language or speech sound errors or having to respond to complex follow-up questions, in front of the rest of the class
- **Pro-social behaviours:** Other children may often put their hand up, despite not getting the right answer, to demonstrate to the teacher that they are engaged and willing to learn. Children may nod and agree with what others are saying, to draw attention away from themselves
- **Avoidance of environments:** Some children may avoid situations and settings that rely on talking. This might include playing on their own, choosing activities that don't rely on talking (e.g., sports or other physical activities) or taking themselves away from language-heavy interactions

### Why do children with SLCN camouflage?

Camouflaging can help pupils navigate social situations and reduce stress at the time, but this often comes at huge personal cost.

Several factors drive the tendency to camouflage, exacerbated by the fact that SLCN is still relatively unknown:

- 1 **Social and academic expectations:** The desire to fit in and be accepted can motivate individuals to hide their difficulties
- 2 **Stigma:** A child with SLCN may be concerned about looking 'stupid' or 'lazy'
- 3 **Internalised expectations:** A child with SLCN may struggle with their own expectations of being 'good enough'



## The impact of camouflaging

While this can offer short-term benefits, such as reduced social anxiety or improved acceptance, the long-term negative effects can be devastating. These include:

### 1. Mental health difficulties:

Constantly hiding your true self can lead to stress, anxiety and depression. Children with SLCN have a higher rate of anxiety and depression than their typically developing peers (for example those with DLD, a subset of SLCN, experience six times the rate of anxiety and twice the rate of depression than peers)

### 2. Identity suppression:

Over time, camouflaging can erode a pupil's sense of identity and self-worth

### 3. Burnout:

The effort required to maintain the camouflage can lead to physical and emotional exhaustion

### 4. Delayed support:

Camouflaging can prevent pupils from seeking the help they need, intensifying their communication challenges. It also means that identification of SLCN is difficult, as needs are very well hidden. This is why screening is so important to reveal and support those with camouflaged SLCN

## Supporting pupils who camouflage

Those with SLCN who camouflage would benefit from:



### An inclusive environment:

Ensure that diverse communication styles are accepted and valued. Encourage open dialogue about communication needs with pupils and staff



### Accessible support:

Ensure that support is available via information about speech, language and communication, screening and intervention



### Increased awareness:

Increase understanding of SLCN around the school by talking about it in classrooms and assemblies. At staff meetings or training days, discuss camouflage behaviours that individuals with SLCN use to help reduce misconceptions and promote empathy



### Being encouraged to self-advocate:

Support your students to express their struggles and seek adaptations without fear of negative repercussions



### Patience and support:

Listen actively and be patient in conversations, allowing students the time and space they need to communicate as effectively as possible

Camouflaging is a complex coping strategy often used by students with SLCN. While it may offer short-term relief, it can harm wellbeing over time. Early identification and a supportive, inclusive school environment are key to helping these pupils express themselves authentically and receive the support they need.

## Speech and language support available...

Support children with SLCN who camouflage with our Speech Link and/or Language Link packages.

These contain:



**SCREENING** – identify pupils with SLCN to understand and meet their needs



**INTERVENTIONS** – support communication skills and promote self-awareness and advocacy



**RESOURCES** – foster inclusivity and acceptance across the school



**TRAINING & ADVICE** – equip staff to understand and support pupils with SLCN effectively



Interested in a free trial to see what our packages can offer? Find out more here:



SCAN ME



# One TA to another



## TRANSITIONS AND THE HOPE OF AN ANNUS MIRABILIS

By **Claire Chambers**, The Link editor and former HLTA

As the school year draws to a close, your mind might be turning to September — new classes, new routines and for many, new challenges. While your focus may be on the children moving on or arriving, don't forget to think about *yourself*. How are you feeling about the changes ahead?

Maybe you're feeling nervous about the class you'll be supporting, especially if you've heard it won't be an easy ride. Perhaps you're about to work with a new teacher after a great year with someone you clicked with. Or you may be struggling to let go of children you've built strong bonds with and worried about how they'll manage without you. If this year has been particularly tough — the kind that knocks your confidence — it's natural to feel unsure about what's next.

Remind yourself that you're not alone. So many support staff have

stood where you are now. One of the true gifts of working in education is the fresh start each September brings — for the children and for us. It's a great time to reset, reflect and renew.

Start thinking now about how to build strong, positive relationships with new pupils. Take time to get a good understanding of their individual needs. Doing your homework now can really set you (and them) up for success.

If you're working with a new teacher, keep communication open and remember that each partnership is

unique, yes you can stand firm on the things that matter to you while giving the new dynamic a chance to develop.

And when it's time to pass on the children you've made deep connections with, share what's worked, what hasn't, and what they'll need most.

Whatever this year has looked like for you — the highs, the lows, the unexpected challenges — you're not alone. With resilience, reflection and a bit of luck, you may just be stepping into your very own *annus mirabilis*.



# Hit the ground running this autumn 2025 with our CPD accredited training courses:



## The Link Speech & Language CPD

Each interactive module has been designed to be flexible to fit in with your busy school life and takes approx. 15-20 hours over an 8-10-week period.

Both courses include child-focussed assignments and feedback from one of our speech and language therapist tutors.



### MODULE 1: Introduction to Speech and Language

Wednesday 8th October

### MODULE 2: Language Intervention Module

Tuesday 23rd September

Modules have been accredited by CPD UK and cost £225.00+VAT each.

*(N.B. Modules are on a rolling timetable)*

**FIND OUT  
MORE HERE**

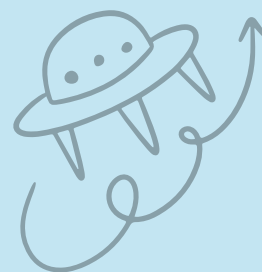


“

“IT WAS THE MOST INFORMATIVE COURSE I HAVE DONE. IT COVERED A RANGE OF AREAS AND A LOT OF INFORMATION BUT ALSO PRACTICAL GUIDANCE OF HOW TO USE THAT KNOWLEDGE TO BEST SUPPORT CHILDREN.”

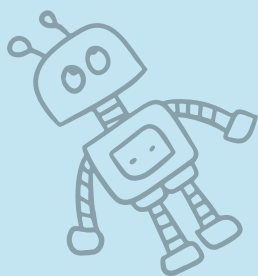
JULIA LANGFORD, LEARNING SUPPORT ASSISTANT, BABINGTON HOUSE SCHOOL, CHISLEHURST





# Follow the empathy road

- ways to support children with SLCN in their classrooms



By **Ginny Bootman**, SEND and relationship specialist, keynote speaker and author

There are so many ways that we can help school staff to support their pupils with SLCN in their classrooms. One of the most important things is to treat every young person as an individual and investigate what their needs are. I regularly go into classrooms and 'play detective' as I can often see things that class teachers and staff who work with the child all the time may not always notice on a day-to-day basis.

A busy classroom needs adaptations which are simple to implement, but which can benefit many. The little things do really make a big difference.

The best ways busy SENCos can begin to get to know their children with SLCN, is to find ways to communicate with them about things they like. The teddy they have with them, that LEGO model they

bring in every day, that fabulous pair of shoes/wellingtons they are wearing. It is about connecting with them about things which matter to them. I find that this not only begins connections but also breaks down barriers.

Going on a trip with a class or dare I say it... going on a residential to help to get to know individuals outside of the formal classroom

setting, helps to begin wonderful conversations.

Games are a great way to start to connect with children with SLCN, especially when the need to communicate through language can be lessened: Dobble and Uno are great examples.





Have you  
thought  
about..



### 1 Saying a child's name before praising them?

This draws their attention, and I think it acts as a 'fanfare' to the rest of the class and can make praise more impactful and boost confidence.

*E.g., "Emma, I love how you helped your partner just now!"*

### 2 Breaking tasks down into smaller chunks for everyone?

I always think we should bring it back to how we would like to learn. I don't know about you, but I would love tasks to be broken down into smaller manageable chunks. This is especially true when there are lots of questions on a worksheet. Simply cutting them up so that the child can complete one at a time can make such a huge difference and reduce stress.

### 3 Giving instructions in a simpler way with fewer words?

This takes a lot of getting used to as it can seem rather 'stern' however in this case less is actually more..

### 4 Adding visuals into tasks?

(I liken this to if I was in a new country and I didn't know the language.) When pupils see visuals alongside instructions, they grasp concepts more easily and can revisit them later for reinforcement. A well-placed image can reduce confusion and make learning more accessible.

Think how much easier life would be if we had those visuals always dotted around us!

### 5 Creating a 'check-in' sheet that connects related vocabulary?

In a fractions lesson where students encounter numerous terms. Imagine a resource that lists key words—like numerator, denominator, equivalent, improper, mixed number—with clear explanations and examples. This would reinforce understanding and help students recognise connections between concepts.

### 6 Removing the pressure of 'reading' by having whole-class sets of books with no words?

The power of talking about what we see, without the 'fear' of struggling to read, is a joy to see. Get those picture books back in your classroom and watch pupils' confidence and engagement grow!

### 7 How we often remove objects of reference too early for children?

Thinking about fractions again, having constant access to visuals, like fraction walls, helps deepen understanding and encourages discussion. I love having fraction wall sheets dotted around on the tables for children to refer to rather than expecting children to rely on memory.

### 8 Using a 'one page profile' to understand children more?

These can be found with a simple search on the internet as there are many templates available to look at and make your own.

By finding about their likes and dislikes we can tailor what we do to help them feel safe and valued. I love reading this document and discussing it with parents to find ways to support our children.

#### For example:

*Alfie finds the classroom environment challenging. By playing detective, we find out that he likes to have his own space with photos of his pets around him. Standing and looking out of the window brings him joy and helps him feel safe and secure. Every time members of staff say his name to praise him, we see his face light up.*

Consistency is key! Knowing that tasks will be broken down into manageable steps, that familiar comforts like LEGO at playtime are always available and that picture books are within reach, creates a sense of security for children. Predictability fosters confidence, reduces anxiety and allows students to engage more fully in their learning. Small, consistent routines can make a big difference in a child's experience at school!

Ginny is author of *Independent Thinking on Being a SENDCO and an Associate of Independent Thinking*.

Ginny Bootman is not only a SENDCO across four schools in the Midlands, but she also has a breadth of experience of school life as a class teacher, senior manager and also a headteacher.

Or, in her words, "I've been teaching longer than I haven't. Going that extra mile involves some hard conversations and a willingness to challenge the powers that be. And more than a few cups of tea along the way."

## Supporting children with

# SELECTIVE MUTISM



By **Lucy Nathanson**, child therapist, selective mutism specialist, bestselling author and international speaker



Do you know a child who doesn't talk at school but speaks freely at home? Or maybe they talk to friends but not to adults at school?

66



Selective mutism (SM, also known as situational mutism) is an anxiety-based condition where a child can speak in some situations but not others. Most commonly, they speak freely at home with parents and siblings but are unable to do so in school, with strangers or with extended family members.

Each child with SM is unique. Some are completely non-verbal at school, some may be able to speak to a friend in private, while others may talk openly to peers but are unable to speak to adults.

There is also a distinction between high-profile and low-profile SM. High-profile SM is a consistent inability to speak in certain situations. Low-profile SM is when the fear of disapproval from others is greater than the fear of talking. These children may slip under the radar because they may answer the register or give brief responses to teachers, but these situations are still extremely hard;

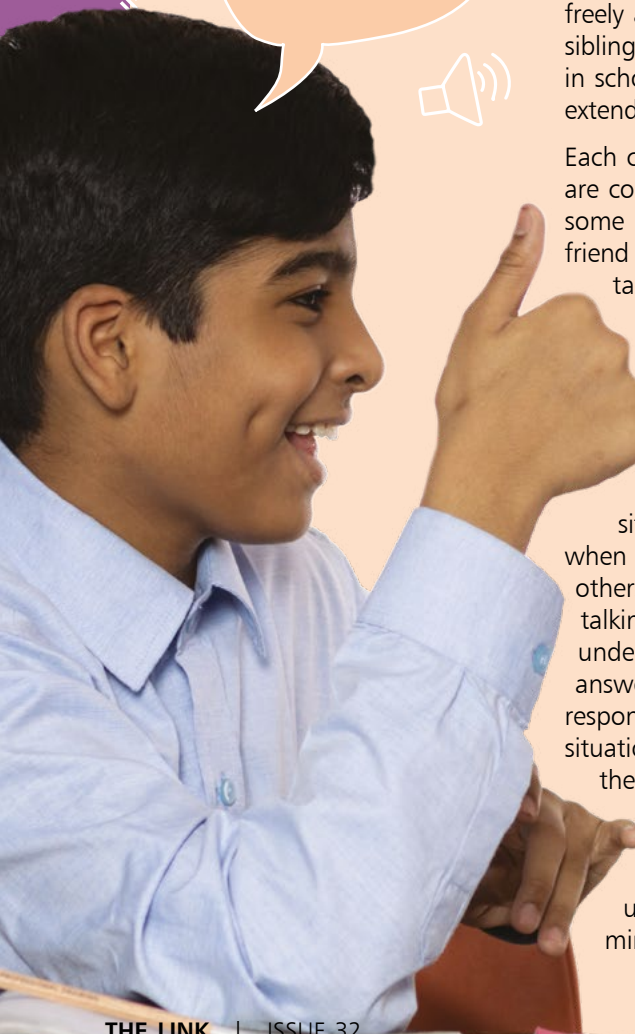
they push themselves to respond as that is the expectation.

These children are unable to speak freely but will muster up the courage to say the bare minimum to get by.

SM is a complex condition as it often affects more than talking. Children may also struggle with physical activities like PE and drama, eating in front of others or using the school toilet (I have known many children with SM to hold all day and be desperate to go to the toilet when they get home). As an anxiety condition, children may be impacted by SM in a multitude of ways, making each child's experience different.

SM is a safeguarding concern as children are usually unable to ask for help. One parent shared how her child choked on a pear but was unable to alert anyone—luckily, a TA noticed her quiet distress. These children aren't choosing to remain silent; they experience extreme anxiety that makes speaking feel impossible. It's akin to severe stage fright in daily situations—a 'freeze' response. Understanding that SM is not stubbornness, rudeness or shyness is crucial in providing support.

Children with SM are often compliant and well-behaved, which can lead to their needs being overlooked. However, it's crucial to take SM seriously. If a child is left to 'outgrow' SM, it can persist





into adulthood, leading to further mental health challenges, difficulties in friendships, relationships, job interviews, and employment. If untreated, SM can have a lifelong impact.

The good news? With the right support, children with SM can gain confidence and expand their ability to communicate.

### How schools can help

Teachers and school staff play a vital role in supporting children with SM. Ideally, all staff working with these children should receive SM training and where possible a trained SM professional (typically a speech and language therapist, although this could be a CAMHS specialist or educational psychologist, for example).

### Creating a supportive environment

- Avoid putting children on the spot or pressuring them to speak
- Allow non-verbal communication, such as nodding, pointing, or writing to allow participation without pressure
- For class activities provide non-verbal options for all pupils, so the child with SM isn't singled out
- Pair the child with a patient, compassionate buddy to help them feel more comfortable and possibly act as a communication bridge
- Some people, including autistic individuals, may be unable to speak due to stressors in their environment, such as sensory overwhelm. For this reason, identifying and reducing sources of stress is paramount
- For older children, asking them what would help them to feel more comfortable is important. This could be done in non-verbal ways or via a parent if this would be easier for them

### Supporting gradual progress

- Having a trusted school-based adult that the child can build rapport with is key
- Start with small, manageable steps, that are achievable for the child

- The "sliding in technique" where a familiar person (usually a parent) plays with the child in a private room at school before slowly introducing others is an effective strategy for many children. This must be conducted correctly for it to be effective; room changes or staff entering the room can disrupt progress. Ideally, an SM trained professional would provide guidance
- Encourage peer support: the way classmates interact with a child with SM can make a huge difference. Encourage peers to not pressure the child or show any reaction should the child speak. My book 'Why doesn't Alice talk at school?\*' can help peers understand SM

### The role of families

Collaboration between schools and families is essential for effective support. Parents and caregivers can help by:

- Sharing insights on what strategies work at home and what situations cause the most anxiety for their child
- Supporting interventions like the sliding-in technique
- Using video or audio recordings—some children are able to record themselves speaking at home and gradually share these in school

Supporting a child with SM requires patience, understanding, and teamwork. By creating a low-pressure environment, encouraging gradual exposure, promoting peer support, and working with families, schools can help these children feel safe and confident. With the right strategies in place, children with SM can develop the confidence to communicate and thrive.

\* [www.tinyurl.com/25883s98](http://www.tinyurl.com/25883s98)



For free resources, including transition tips and an SM 'dos and don'ts' summary sheet that can be distributed

amongst all school staff, see: [www.confidentchildren.co.uk/freebies](http://www.confidentchildren.co.uk/freebies)

The book "A letter to my teacher – why I can't speak at school" can be shared with teachers to help them gain further insight on SM.

For further resources, see SMiRA [www.selectivemutism.org.uk](http://www.selectivemutism.org.uk)

Lucy Nathanson, selective mutism specialist & founder of [www.confidentchildren.co.uk](http://www.confidentchildren.co.uk)



# NATTER IN NATURE:

How Forest School can provide invaluable communication opportunities



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

Visit a UK Primary school and there is a good chance that they are channelling the powers of Forest School. The benefits to learning, independence, pupil and teacher engagement and mental wellbeing are plentiful, as the growing body of research shows.

Jess Drake, speech and language therapist based in Hebden Bridge, UK, was curious enough about the Forest School movement, to train to become a Forest School leader in 2009. She now uses this knowledge when carrying out speech and language therapy in Forest Schools. Here, she answers some of our questions:



**Q: Why did you consider Forest School to be a good place for speech and language work?**

**A:** The more I worked with children in the classroom, the more I wanted to take them outside. There are SO many merits and the ethos of Forest School connects with many of our interventions. It's a natural space that allows for communication, for example:

Whilst being outdoors children are encouraged to engage with nature and connect with the natural world. This in turn **sparks curiosity** and leads onto natural and often **imaginative play**. Forest School advocates for children to be able to be able to follow their interests with adults following and joining in the play. By doing so, **adults can extend on children's play** and use

strategies such as **commenting** to **develop language**.

I once heard language described as being similar to "dark matter", invisible but everywhere. Outdoor play in woodland settings provides a highly practical and experiential approach to learning new words; and **vocabulary** is indeed everywhere! Working with children in such an environment, combined with talking about what the word sounds like, and its meaning too, helps to boost vocabulary skills.

There are many imaginative opportunities to supporting **storytelling** skills whilst being outdoors. There is something about sitting around the fire, having a warm drink that makes







for a natural place to tell stories. Children can use natural resources such as making log dogs, (mud/clay puppets or faces on trees or making characters from string, dressing them with leaves) and making stories about them. These characters can be based on familiar books or created from a child's imagination.

- There is a natural space to play 'people' games. With consent, children can play blindfold games such as leading each other on a nature walk and using their senses to explore the area. Children can also **work together** in familiar activities such as building dens, putting up tarpaulin (to help protect them from inclement weather) and preparing food/cooking together.
- A higher adult-to-child ratio and having access to skilled adults,

facilitating children through child-led activities/play are imperative to developing a child's **self-esteem and "try again"** approach. This sense of achievement gives children the excitement of something to talk about. I recall a child, making a wooden spinner, rushing back into the classroom, eagerly wanting to talk about what they had created.

**Q: How do you structure your sessions?**

**A:** Forest School advocates that sessions should take place over the long term and follow a familiar routine. Working as an outdoor therapist, I try to follow this. I will always have targets in mind and will loosely plan sessions in advance, however, I am fully prepared to be flexible with these plans and let the child lead!

**Q: So, do you support children who struggle to focus in large outdoor spaces?**

**A:** There is something about being outdoors that has a positive impact on a child's ability to engage. The following can help best support/prepare for sessions:

- A high adult to child ratio is essential so there will be an adult available to help the child who is struggling
- Having a loose structure, a familiar routine and sessions over time so the child knows what to expect
- Giving the child space to develop and ensuring that activities are pitched at the right level with the right support
- Getting to know the child in advance of sessions

Forest Schools offer a natural and dynamic setting that boosts communication through curiosity, imaginative play and collaboration. Its ethos aligns well with speech and language work, offering children an engaging space to develop communication skills while enjoying the many benefits of nature. So, pull your wellies on, wrap up warm and get your class outside to have a good old natter in nature.

# TOP



# HELP DESK QUERIES

for our speech and language  
therapy team

Our friendly Help Desk is available Monday – Friday to support you with any questions you may have regarding Speech Link and Language Link.

At Speech & Language Link, we are committed to helping schools get the very best from their pupils with SLCN. Led by a team of experienced TAs, and supported by our experienced speech and language therapists, our Help Desk is available to assist subscribing schools with any questions and to help you keep your SLCN support on track. Here are the most frequently asked questions our therapists receive, with responses from Yin Collighan, one of our specialist speech and language therapists. Contact our friendly HelpDesk at: [helpdesk@speechlink.co.uk](mailto:helpdesk@speechlink.co.uk)

## 1

**We have both Speech Link and Language Link and following the assessments a pupil has been recommended interventions in both packages. Should we work on speech sounds or language first?**

Good question! Language should be the priority, as enhancing language skills supports speech sound development. For example, if a child has limited vocabulary (a language need) and cannot make some age-appropriate speech sounds (speech sound needs), teaching words helps expand vocabulary, exposes the child to sounds in various contexts, and supports their development.

If a child struggles to communicate due to speech difficulties, it's vital to support their understanding through pictures, gestures, or visual choices (e.g., "Would you like the duck or truck?" while showing both). Spending time with the child, such as looking at books together, also helps you become familiar with their speech and improves communication.

Check out the **Speech in the Classroom** tab in your Speech Link package for more strategies.

## 2

**We have Speech Link and a pupil had been recommended a list of speech programmes – which one should we start on?**

You have two main choices:

The list is in the order of which sounds should come first in typical development. You are welcome to work on the sounds in this order if you wish. However, working on sounds in the order of what could be the easiest for your student to produce might be better for them, as they are more likely to be successful with the sounds that they find easiest. This will help them feel more confident and motivated. Ask them to copy you saying the recommended sounds for all the recommended programmes. Then choose the programme for the sound that they find the easiest to say first.

**Find out more about Speech Link**





3

Some of our pupils have come out with language scores that are lower than expected. Am I doing something wrong?

If you've followed the guidance on completing the assessment (check out our **How To User Guides** in the assessment tab if you haven't), then no, you're not doing anything wrong!

Sometimes a pupil's communication difficulties only become apparent when everything else is stripped away, such as during a language assessment. Some pupils are skilled at masking these challenges in daily life. For example, if they don't understand an instruction, they might copy peers or rely on visual cues like pictures, gestures or facial expressions. They may also follow instructions easily when it's part of a familiar routine. Because they appear to manage well, these difficulties can go unnoticed, making them harder to identify and support.

Rest assured—you've done the right thing. The next step is to follow the recommendations and implement any suggested interventions.

4

We have been given recommendations from your package, but the child also has a speech and language therapist. What advice do I follow?

We always say that if a child is under a speech and language therapist and there are recommendations in our package, go with the therapist's advice. This is because the therapist will have very specific knowledge about that child and therefore will use this knowledge and their expertise within their advice. Often, our recommendations following an assessment align with the therapist's advice. It would be worth discussing whether you can use the suggested interventions to meet the therapist's advice, as this could be an efficient way to meet the child's needs.

Find out more about Language Link



5

Some of our pupils are making great progress in interventions, but struggle to apply what they've learned in the classroom.

Lovely to hear about the progress that they are making! Children can find it very tricky however, to transfer their skills over to the classroom, as outside of structured, focused sessions, they may not think to use their newfound skills. We recommend that a handover system is in place between the person who is running the sessions and the teacher, so that everyone knows the skills being worked on.

For speech work, generalisation of speech sounds into everyday life comes later in the programmes, but it is worth using strategies to support them in the classroom throughout. Most interventions in our Infant and Junior Language Link packages will come with **Teacher Guidance** notes which teachers use to support their children from session to session, in class.

# ASK A Therapist



By **Alison Fowle**, specialist speech and language therapist

Try the Language Link screen for yourself with our **FREE 4-WEEK TRIAL**

**SCAN ME**



**Q** I repeated the Language Link screen with one of my pupils today. We've put intervention in place for this pupil and were hoping to see an improvement when comparing the first screen with the recent one, but they've achieved similar standard scores. Does the fact that the standard score hasn't changed mean that they haven't made progress?

This is a great question!

**A** Let's start by thinking about what the Language Link screen is designed to do. We know that language difficulties are challenging to spot through observation alone, which can lead to pupils with language difficulties being missed or identified late. The goal of the Language Link screen is to help you to:

1. identify all pupils who have difficulty understanding language.
2. decide which pupils would benefit from having support to develop their language skills, either in the classroom or through small group interventions.
3. identify pupils who may need to be discussed with your local specialist services.

Your question suggests that you're attempting to use the Language Link screen as a progress measure. It's important to note that this tool is not designed to measure progress and using it as such can be misleading. The screen identifies the level of a pupil's understanding of language in relation to their peers and highlights areas of need. This is why we recommend completing the screen only once a year, at the start of the academic year, to identify whether a pupil would benefit from language support and determine what form that support should take.

It's also helpful to consider what standard scores represent. Standard scores compare a pupil's performance to a wider population of their peers. Even if a pupil has made progress with their language skills, their standard score may remain unchanged if their progress is in line with that of their peers. This doesn't mean the pupil hasn't improved; it just means that their relative position compared to peers hasn't shifted.

The aim of intervention should always be to improve a pupil's overall language skills, not just to improve their score on a particular test. When it comes to measuring the impact of interventions, it's vital

to use tools that reflect progress in functional language skills, the outcomes of interventions, and the pupil's ability to access learning in the classroom.

The progress measures available in the Infant and Junior Language Link packages include:

- Teacher engagement ratings** – You'll find these in the 'Progress Measures' tab
- Pupil and parent views** – Available under the green 'Pupils & Classes' tab
- Group intervention outcomes** – You can record session outcomes in the 'Intervention' tab (Work with Groups)
- Post-test scores from supplementary teaching** – Outcomes can be recorded in the 'Intervention' tab (Supplementary Teaching)

In summary then, the Language Link screen is a great starting point for identifying pupils with language needs and identifying appropriate support. However, rescreening is not the best way to assess whether an intervention has made a meaningful impact. Instead, focus on pre- and post-intervention progress measures and real-world improvements in the pupil's language skills. Look for changes in their classroom engagement, confidence in communication, and ability to participate in discussions and learning activities.





# Your free LINK COMMUNITY MEMBERSHIP - what's included?



## Talkaways

Watch the latest Talkaways podcast from our resident speech and language therapists.

We know that vocabulary knowledge forms a foundation for academic success. Alison and Juliet discuss ways in which we can support children to learn and remember new words.



## Dates for your diary

We're booked up for events for the rest of the academic year and gearing up to hit the ground running in 25/26. Here's where you can find us!

12TH JUNE

SEND Conference Sandy Park, Exeter

18TH JUNE

West Sussex SENCO Conference, Bognor Regis

3RD JULY

Virtual School and SEND Conference, Bedford

4TH JULY

nasen Live, Birmingham

23RD SEPTEMBER - LINK CPD

Language Intervention Module 2

3RD OCTOBER

National Education Show, Cardiff

8TH OCTOBER - LINK CPD

Introduction to Speech and Language Module 1

10-11TH OCTOBER

Tes SEND Show 2025, London

The Link Community is a finalist in the Educational Resources Awards (ERA) 2025

We are thrilled to announce that your Link Community is an ERA finalist in the Free Educational Resources category.



2025 FINALIST

With over a whopping 3,500 members, it's wonderful to see our followers using The Link Community resource hub just as it has been intended – to help support your pupils with speech, language and communication difficulties.

NOT A MEMBER YET? REGISTER HERE:



SCAN ME

SECONDARY  
LanguageLink

We are equally delighted that Secondary Language Link has made it to the finals in the *Special Education Resource or Equipment* category.

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



## Get in touch

Have you got something speech and language focussed that you would like to share with our community?

Send over your ideas to  
[claire.chambers@speechlink.co.uk](mailto:claire.chambers@speechlink.co.uk)





## The Link magazine is Evolving

At Speech & Language Link, we're dedicated to supporting you in helping pupils with speech, language and communication needs. We also understand that many schools are looking for more sustainable ways to access resources—like reading *The Link* magazine online to reduce paper use.

While we use carbon-balanced paper and have always intended *The Link* to be a valuable, lasting resource, we've been thinking carefully about how to move forward in a more eco-conscious way—while still keeping the magazine free for schools that want it.

Starting from next spring we will continue to send *The Link* magazine by post to the SENCo in every school subscribed to a Speech Link or



Language Link package, as well as to any schools who have staff who are Link Community members. This means from spring 2026 you'll need to be either a free member of The Link Community or a subscriber to Speech & Language Link for your school to continue receiving a free copy of the magazine.

There's nothing you need to do right now. You'll receive your autumn issue as usual later this year, which will include more details about how you can continue to enjoy the printed version—or make the switch to digital if you prefer.

## Training

School staff who can spot early signs of SLCN, apply targeted support strategies and work effectively with speech and language therapists, play a crucial role in helping every child succeed. Consistent, informed support can make a lasting difference in a child's life.

The Link Speech & Language CPD modules will help you do just that. The therapist-led modules will take an average of 2 hours per week over 8 to 10 weeks and are suitable for those who are new to SLCN and experienced practitioners alike.

**Module 1 must be completed before Module 2.**

**Language Intervention Module 2**  
Tuesday 23rd September at 11.00am

**Introduction to Speech and Language Module 1**  
Wednesday 8th October 10.30am

**Each module is £225+VAT per participant.**



## OUR FACEBOOK GROUP: SPEECH AND LANGUAGE SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS

Join the conversation with 3.9k 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.



# SpeechLink



## Speech Link – the original speech sound programme

The Speech Link online speech screen, training and interventions help your school to easily support pupils, aged 4-8 years, with developmental speech sound difficulties.

It identifies common speech errors and gives staff the resources needed to work effectively to improve speech. Clear indication of when to involve a speech and language therapist is given.

### The package includes:

- ✓ Online speech screen
- ✓ Intervention programmes
- ✓ Resources for teachers
- ✓ In-package training
- ✓ Data and progress measures
- ✓ Materials for families to support speech at home

“

I THINK IT'S FANTASTIC. IT TAKES A LOT OF THAT PRESSURE AWAY, BECAUSE IT'S ALL THERE. IT'S A FULL AND EFFECTIVE INTERVENTION. IT MAKES LIFE EASIER.”

HLTA, COVENTRY



**FREE  
TRIAL**



The Speech & Language Link  
whole school approach

