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SECONDARY

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DEVELOPMENTAL LANGUAGE DISORDER
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Dear SENCo,

Hello and welcome to the 2025-26 school year! I hope it's already off to a flying start for you and your team.

This issue of *The Link* magazine is packed with useful insights and resources to help you kick-start the support your students with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) truly deserve.

October marked **Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) Awareness Month,** but with over **7% of pupils** in every classroom likely to have DLD, it's a topic that deserves attention all year round. Read an excerpt from our handbook, **The Ultimate Guide to SLCN,** opposite and turn to page 10 where **Becky Francis,** director of ClarkSLT and co-founder of RADLD, shares her expert advice on how all school staff can empower students with DLD.

This term, some students with selective mutism (SM) may have joined your school. Transitions can be particularly challenging for those with SM and can lead to heightened anxiety. On page 12, child therapist **Lucy Nathanson,** shares her practical guidance on supporting students with SM in your setting.

For your support staff, whether new or experienced, we've included a reflective **case study** - based on a student I supported years ago! Our therapists have also created a fun **crossword challenge** to complete. Two correct entries will be lucky enough to win one of our coveted, limited-edition, travel mugs in our random prize draw. See pages 6-7.

In this issue's **Ask a therapist,** standardised scores are the hot topic; what they really mean and why they matter. And, if you're looking to spark (or reignite) a love of reading in your students, the **Letterbox Project** on page 16 could be just what you need.

As always, thank you for everything you do to support young people with SLCN. I hope you find this issue useful, inspiring and maybe even a little fun!

Please get in touch if you have anything you'd like to share with schools in a future issue.

Best wishes,
Claire Chambers

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

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helpdesk@speechlink.co.uk or phone 0333 577 0784

Social media: @ Speech & Language Link
Instagram: @speechandlanguagelink

glossary
semantics · word finding · grammar · DLD · UNDERSTANDING · process SUPPORT · DLD · Pragmatics Verbal learning & memory

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

DEVELOPMENTAL LANGUAGE DISORDER (DLD)

(Abridged from The Ultimate Guide to SLCN)

The term developmental language disorder (DLD) is used when children have a language disorder that is not associated with another condition that would also result in language and communication difficulties, such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), Down syndrome or hearing impairment. Children can have a diagnosis of DLD and another condition that does not cause communication difficulties, such as ADHD or a motor disorder.

Children (and young people) with DLD have significant difficulties with understanding and/ or use of language which affect their spoken and written language skills. Their language abilities are substantially below those expected for their age, which results in difficulty functionally communicating, participating socially and accessing the curriculum. These difficulties are persistent; they start in early development and continue throughout childhood, the teenage years and into adulthood. This means that without support, these children have a poor prognosis.

Prevalence of DLD

The prevalence of DLD is estimated to be 7.58% of the population, equating to two children in every class, meaning that the condition is more common than ASD. The language difficulties for children with DLD are felt to be stable and persistent, so it is felt that this figure can be applied to the teenage and adult population.

Difficulties

Some, or all of the following language domains may be affected:

• **Semantics**
• **Grammar**
• **Word finding**
• **Pragmatics**
• **Verbal learning and memory**

**RADLD –
radld.org**

Top tips for learners with DLD

Allow time for processing before expecting a response, e.g., 10 second rule

Pre- and post-teaching of curriculum topic vocabulary and concepts can support access to classroom learning

Encourage talking around a word they are unable to remember, e.g., giving its category, function, location and description

Don't completely avoid using non-literal language (e.g., idioms, metaphors), but ensure that you explicitly explain the meaning of what you are saying, using the context and visuals to support understanding

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:

SCAN ME

Why identifying students' LANGUAGE SKILLS in Year 7 is crucial
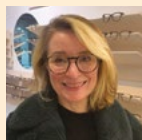
By **Natalie Strong,** speech and language therapist and **Yin Collighan**, specialist speech and language therapist at Speech & Language Link

Many students begin secondary school with unidentified speech, language, and communication needs (SLCN). These difficulties are often missed or are misidentified, leading to long-term challenges in education and wellbeing.

A 2014 study by The Communication Trust revealed approximately 40% of children with SLCN were going identified, with older students (particularly those with receptive language difficulties) being the most overlooked. In Key Stage 3 alone, 48% of these students remained unidentified. This represents a significant and concerning gap in support.

In today's climate of stretched educational resources and a shortage of speech and language therapists, school staff often feel overwhelmed and unable to provide the level of support they aspire to. This is understandably frustrating and the need for change has never been more urgent. Addressing these issues early in secondary education can make a profound difference.

The language demands of secondary school

Transitioning to secondary school brings a steep increase in the complexity and volume of language students must process. From navigating multiple subjects and teachers, to managing higher academic and social expectations, students are suddenly required to use sophisticated language and executive function skills, often before they are developmentally ready.

At the same time, adolescence is a period of significant brain development and identity formation. These changes can further complicate how young people manage communication and emotional regulation.

Hidden communication needs

While some language difficulties may have had minimal impact at primary level, they can often become more pronounced at secondary school. Yet, these issues frequently remain hidden. Students may mask their difficulties by copying peers, relying on routines, or exhibiting behaviours that are mistakenly attributed to other causes.

Developmental language disorder (DLD), a lifelong condition affecting language comprehension and expression, affects roughly two children in every classroom. However, difficulties with understanding language are a challenge to detect through observation alone.

Alarmingly, many students are only diagnosed after reaching crisis point, such as school refusal, anxiety, self-harm, or behavioural outbursts. Research by Hollo et al. (2014) shows that 8 in 10 children with emotional and behavioural disorders have unidentified language difficulties.

Academic and social impact

Language and communication skills are fundamental to literacy, learning, and forming relationships. Without proper identification and support, students with SLCN face a significantly increased risk of academic underachievement, poor mental health, and social exclusion.

Only 20% of students with SLCN achieve a grade 4/C or above in English and maths at GCSE, compared with 64% of all pupils (ICAN & RCSLT 2018). Early intervention can mitigate these outcomes—but even at Year 7, it is not too late to make a difference.

The case for universal language screening

Universal screening in Year 7 is a powerful tool for identifying hidden SLCN. **Secondary Language Link** provides schools with a standardised online assessment to evaluate all Year 7 students. This ensures no one falls through the cracks.

The programme also includes targeted, fully resourced interventions tailored to students with receptive language and communication difficulties. Alongside this, online training equips staff with the skills to support students with SLCN directly in the classroom.

Research has shown that students benefit significantly from these interventions, with marked improvements in communication, confidence and academic engagement.

"Without proper identification and support, students with SLCN face a significantly increased risk of academic underachievement, poor mental health and social exclusion."

A call to school staff - your role is vital

You play a crucial role in identifying and supporting students with language needs. While the challenges are real, so too are the opportunities to create meaningful change.

Effective tools like **Secondary Language Link** can empower you to take proactive steps to ensure that every student with SLCN receives the support they need to thrive.

Your commitment can transform lives. It's never too late to start.

A FREE SECONDARY LANGUAGE LINK TRIAL INCLUDES 15 ASSESSMENTS FOR YOU TO USE. BOOK A TRIAL NOW AND SEE THE DIFFERENCE IT CAN MAKE.

One TA to another

?

By **Claire Chambers**, The Link editor, former HTLA and NHS speech and language therapy assistant

What you don't see at first

So, September has been and gone. You may have spotted one student during transition day who seemed like a bit of a "pickle" - maybe a bit cheeky or easily distracted, but nothing that really set off alarm bells.

Fast forward a few weeks, and that same student keeps popping up in the lessons you support – or rather, doesn't. You notice they're increasingly missing from lessons and realise they're regularly 'down the SLT corridor', in isolation, and you find yourself thinking: *how did we get here so quickly?*

It's easy to miss the early signs, especially when behaviour masks something deeper. I had a very similar situation with a Year 8 student, Liam*. At first glance, he just seemed defiant and disengaged, but the more I got to know him, the more it became clear there was more going on. Liam struggled to follow complex instructions and express his ideas properly. Instead of asking for help, he began to play up.

Here's what I'd suggest if you notice a student going down a similar path:

- 🙂 **Start with observation** – Keep track of when and why they're being removed from class. Are there patterns? Subjects? Specific tasks?

- 🙂 **Talk to your SENCo** – If you suspect there might be more going on, raise it early. The quicker it's flagged, the more support can be put in place.

- 🙂 **Build trust** – If you're regularly in their classes, just being consistent and approachable can make a huge difference. Let them know you're there to help, not to judge.

- 🙂 **Use clear, simple instructions** – Check for understanding. Sometimes, it's not defiance.

- 🙂 **Be their advocate** – Feed back to teachers about what's working and what's not. You might spot things they miss because you're seeing the same behaviour across multiple lessons.

- 🙂 **Be patient and persistent** – Behaviour doesn't change overnight, but with the right support, a student who's been written off as "difficult" can really turn things around.

Sometimes what looks like a behaviour problem is actually a communication problem in disguise. Spotting that early and acting on it can stop a student from slipping through the cracks. You can really help to make a difference!

*Names have been changed for this article.

CROSSWORD CHALLENGE

— Can you find the secret word?

Why not have a go at our crossword and see if you can work out the secret word hidden in green by solving the clues?

We're giving away 2 of our fantastic travel mugs. Perfect for keeping your brew safe as you walk about the school and, trust me, piping hot! Just the thing as the weather cools down.
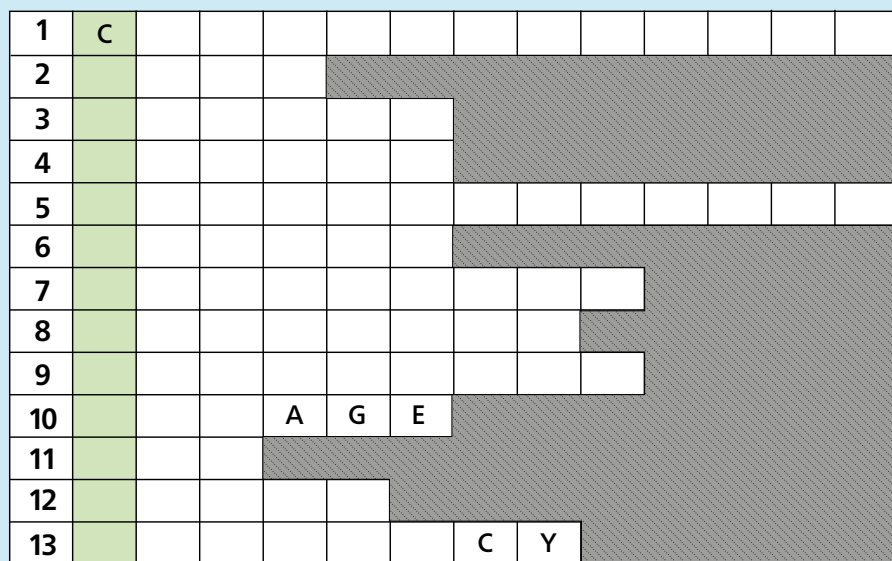
To be in with a chance of winning, just solve the puzzle and email the secret word to: **claire.chambers@speechlink.co.uk**

The competition closes at **midnight on Friday 28th November** and we'll pick two winners, at random, from all the correct answers.

Good luck – we'd love to see your entry!

Stuck?
Gain access to our speech and language blogs and resources for free at:
**The Link Community** below…

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Clues (across):

1. Another term for receptive language, starting with **C** (13)

2. A type of question that gets a child talking (4)

3. Working _____ difficulties can have implications for language processing (6)

4. Children with this phobia struggle to talk in certain situations: selective _____ (6)

5. See Clue 1: *Another* word for this. Language difficulties of this type are impossible to spot in the classroom by observation alone (13)

6. Labelling objects (6)

7. Speech sounds uttered alone are said in _____ (9)

8. Breaking down sentences into parts to support understanding (8)

9. This focus-related skill provides a solid foundation for speech and language development (9)

10. _____ **age** is the process of prioritising students and determining what to do next. Speech & Language Link's in-package reports can facilitate this process for those with SLCN (6)

11. Known as 'key words'. Number of words that carry the information necessary for understanding (1,1,1)

12. Syntax is related to the _____ of words (5)

13. ____ **cy**, the ability to understand and work with numbers, relies heavily on language skills (8)

INCLUSIVITY IN SPORT

Raising awareness of the difficulties that can be faced by individuals with communication differences when participating in sport.
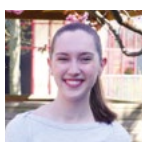
By **Ella James**, president of Marjon's Giving Voice Society, 3rd Year BSc speech and language therapy student

Individuals experiencing speech, language or communication differences may find increasing difficulty interacting with others and participating in extracurricular activities. In a society with reduced awareness of speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) in sport, this can result in extracurricular clubs being ill-equipped to support an individual presenting with a communication difference.

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapy's 'Giving Voice' campaign aims to raise awareness of speech and language therapy and speech, language, and communication differences. This year, the Giving Voice Society at Plymouth Marjon University aimed to spread awareness to those outside the speech and language therapy world. To help others understand the difficulties an individual with a communication difference could face in sport, the society set up a 'silent match' event.

This awareness-raising event involved teams participating in a silent match, lasting for approximately 20 minutes. Plymouth Marjon University's lacrosse, cheerleading, women's futsal, dance, and table tennis teams participated, alongside an under-11s football team from Essex. (Teams were allowed to communicate normally with the coach in case of injury, as part of the health and safety protocol.) While the teams played their silent match, members of the Giving Voice Society observed techniques the players used during the game to compensate for the lack of verbal communication and recorded this to collate into an awareness video. Use of communication included gesture, facial expression and other non-verbal communication were seen, including one of the under 11's football team waving to indicate who wanted the ball.

At the end of each match, players gave their thoughts on the experience. Members of the Giving Voice Society asked each player and coach what they found difficult whilst playing in silence and if it taught them anything. The feedback highlighted that, for both players and coaches, the experience changed their perspective of some of the difficulties people with a communication difference could face when participating in sport. For example:

"The experience was really positive and made me realise how tricky it can be for someone who has a communication difference."

"It was an eye-opening experience."

"It made me think about how to support others that have a communication difference and how to make it easier for people."

Comments highlight the impact this event had on players and coaches alike. During feedback discussions, it was clear that inclusion of individuals with communication differences had not been considered within these teams until this point. Many suggested that the reason for reduced awareness was not having come across an individual with SLCN. Giving Voice members highlighted that communication differences are not always immediately obvious and that individuals may work hard to conceal their difficulties. This prompted useful discussions around assumptions we make about communication. When we spoke about how individuals may have difficulties in understanding some or all of what is being said to them, this was informative and helped to explain that communication differences can present in different ways for everybody.

> "The experience was really positive and made me realise how tricky it can be for someone who has a communication difference."

Creating the opportunity for teams to play these silent matches highlighted many things. One of the main reflections of our Giving Voice group is the clear need for SLCN to be better understood in extra-curricular activities and sport. In our experience, the majority of coaches and players stated they were unaware of potential ways that SLCN might present for individuals, suggesting the need for wider awareness. Educating both players and coaches on possible impacts of SLCN, and what can be done collectively to include anyone with a communication difference, is vital for increasing levels of inclusivity in sport.

The hope is that our silent matches helped to influence and support the teams who participated, shifting their perspective to consider the impacts of SLCN for individuals participating in extra-curricular sport. We hope that the creation of our awareness video, summarising the event, has created a ripple effect across other sports teams and schools, making others consider the impact of SLCN on sport participation. We would encourage as many teams as possible to trial a silent match, or silent training session, to increase experience and awareness of SLCN outside of the classroom.

SCAN ME

Watch Ella's awareness video here.

Empowering young people with

DEVELOPMENTAL LANGUAGE DISORDER (DLD)

By **Becky Clark**, director of ClarkSLT, RADLD co-founder, Fellow of RCSLT

For young people with DLD, the relevance of developing core language skills cannot be underestimated. Understanding key words, using basic grammar to convey a clear message, understanding the language of time and using narrative skills to retell experiences are all key abilities for learning and everyday life.

Targeting these foundational skills are important; however, communication is complex and impacts of DLD are wide ranging. Language processing difficulties are persistent and with age, the demands of spoken and written language increase. Subject-specific vocabulary increases exponentially and tasks rely more heavily on interpreting ambiguous language and expressing abstract/complex ideas. Beyond school, those with DLD can experience ongoing barriers with spoken and written language at work, within work, social settings and independent living activities.

So, what – beyond linguistics skills – should we be prioritising to support?

Communication strategies

For successful communication and language learning, explicit awareness of strategies is also crucial. By developing an awareness and providing practice, children with DLD can consciously select from the tools available.

APPROACHES

Modelling

• Say when you find communication challenging, e.g., "That didn't make sense to me, it was too much information"

• 'Think out loud' to highlight strategies in real time, e.g., "I'm going to read that again slowly"; "I can't remember what it's called, I'll describe it"

Explicit focus

• Explore different strategies that everyone can use when words are confusing or something is hard to explain

Practice

• Use fun activities to provide opportunities for the student to practise the specific target

• Consider opportunities for the student to try the strategy in different situations. Discuss subtle prompts that would be useful and acceptable to them within the classroom

Environment

• Reinforce with the whole class that seeking clarification is a strength

• Provide age-appropriate visual reminders for the whole class, encouraging use of communication strategies

Self Awareness

Understanding their own profile can support students with DLD to make sense of their daily language challenges, support their self-image and support their view of themselves as a learner.

APPROACHES

Validating differences

• Educate all students about differences in how we learn and communicate and relate these to wider concepts of diversity

• Provide opportunities for staff and students to talk about their own differences to the students

Understanding of themselves

• Support the students with DLD to understand their strengths as well as the difficulties they experience with language. See the **'DLD and Me'** website **www.dldandme.co.uk**

• Parental involvement is essential, along with a sensitive, individualised approach. Adjust the content and the timing of steps to take account of the young person's readiness to take on board information and the questions they ask

Families

• Offer DLD related discussion sessions for parents/carers including how to talk about their child's language difficulties at home

• Signpost to free **'DLD Together'** courses offered by Afasic: **www.afasic.org.uk** and NAPLIC: **www.naplic.org.uk**

Self-Advocacy

Students with DLD need support to develop confidence to use strategies, and to express their views, needs and preferences. These self-advocacy skills are important for their wellbeing both at school and in the future.

APPROACHES

Direct teaching

• Teach the concept of self-advocacy using simple language and real examples or video clips

• Support the young person to explain DLD or to describe their challenges with talking and understanding in their own way

Media representation

• Analyse media with characters who have difficulties understanding and talking and create character profiles with the strategies they use

• See for example **RADLD** video clips: **www.youtube.com/RADLD**. Students could create their own stories about DLD

• Support the student to create art, poetry or short films about their strengths and their challenges with language

Summary

DLD interventions should combine a balanced and individualised focus on **skills**, **strategies**, **self-awareness** and **self-advocacy**. Furthermore, whole class conversations about language and communication differences are important as this both aids the individual's understanding of their own daily challenges and increases peer acceptance of their differences. Empowerment through developing insight into personal profiles, reducing camouflaging behaviours and improving the wellbeing outcomes for individuals with DLD should be high on our agenda.

ClarkSLT provides speech and language therapy support for young people in SE England with communication differences, including DLD. For more information visit: **www.clarkslt.co.uk**

Supporting students with
SELECTIVE MUTISM

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

Know a student who doesn't talk at school but speaks freely at home? Or maybe talks to friends, but not adults at school?

Selective mutism (SM, sometimes known as situational mutism) is anxiety-based, meaning a person can speak in some situations but not others. Most commonly, they speak freely at home with parents and siblings but can't talk in school, with strangers, or with extended family members.

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 students may slip under the radar due to answering the register or giving brief responses; despite these situations being extremely hard, they push themselves to respond to meet expectations. These students can't speak freely but will muster up the courage to say the bare minimum.

SM is a complex condition, often affecting more than talking. Students may also struggle with physical activities (PE and drama, eating in front of others or using the school toilet).

SM is a safeguarding concern as students are usually unable to ask for help. One parent reported her child choking, being unable to alert anyone—luckily, a TA noticed her quiet distress. These students aren't choosing to remain silent; they experience extreme anxiety, making speaking feel impossible. It's akin to severe stage fright: a 'freeze' response. Understanding that SM is not stubbornness, rudeness or shyness is crucial.

Students with SM are often compliant and well-behaved, leading to their needs being overlooked. It's crucial to take SM seriously. If a person 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.

However, with the right support, students with SM can gain confidence and expand their ability to communicate.

How schools can help

School staff are vital in supporting students with SM. Ideally, all staff should receive SM training, and a trained SM professional (e.g., a speech and language therapist, CAMHS specialist or educational psychologist) should provide guidance about individual students.

Creating a supportive environment

- ✅ Avoid putting the student on the spot or pressuring them to speak
- ✅ Allow non-verbal communication, e.g., nodding, pointing, or writing – participation without pressure
- ✅ Provide non-verbal options for all students, to avoid singling out the person with SM
- ✅ Pair the student with a patient, compassionate buddy, helping them feel more comfortable and possibly acting as a communication bridge
- ✅ Make reasonable adjustments – allowing exemption from oral assessments/ presentations or pre-recording if the student is comfortable
- ✅ Ask the student what would help them to feel more comfortable. Use non-verbal ways or via a parent if easier
- ✅ Students may struggle with trips – find out what will make them feel more comfortable in accessing the trip
- ✅ The student may also need additional support in transitions, e.g., college
- ✅ Some people, including Autistic individuals, may be unable to speak due to environmental stressors, such as sensory overwhelm. Identify and reduce sources of stress
- ✅ Be flexible and willing to adapt daily routines, considering the student's SM

Supporting gradual progress

- ✅ Have a trusted school-based adult that the student can build rapport with – note that building trusted relationships can take a long time for young people with SM
- ✅ Start with small, manageable steps, that are achievable

- ✅ A targeted small steps intervention with a trusted adult must be conducted correctly to be effective; room changes or staff entering rooms can disrupt progress. Ideally, an SM trained therapist provides guidance. It is important that all intervention is discreet to avoid the student feeling uncomfortable
- ✅ Encourage peer support – how classmates interact with a person with SM makes a huge difference. Encourage peers to not pressure the person or show any reaction should they speak
- ✅ Having a friend from primary school, or a new friend, in all classes can help reduce anxiety

The role of families

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

- ✅ Sharing insights on what works at home and what situations cause the most anxiety
- ✅ Supporting interventions
- ✅ Using video or audio recordings – some students can record themselves speaking at home and gradually share these in school
- ✅ Check-ins with parents via email or phone

Supporting a student with SM requires patience, understanding, and teamwork. Creating a low-pressure environment, encouraging gradual exposure, promoting peer support and working with families, helps these young people feel safe and confident. With the right strategies in place, students with SM can develop the confidence to communicate and thrive.
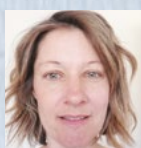
Free resources, include transition tips and a *'dos and don'ts'* summary sheet that can be distributed amongst school staff: **www.confidentchildren.co.uk/freebies**

The book, *"A letter to my teacher – why I can't speak at school"* helps teachers gain further insight on SM.

For further resources, visit **www.selectivemutism.org.uk**

ASK A Therapist

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

What is a standardised assessment and why use it?

A. **S**tandardised assessments helps show how a child's score compares to others of the same age. It tells us how close or far their result is from the average.

This helps teachers and professionals understand a child's needs. It's not about passing or failing – it's about getting the right support in place.

Why age matters

Some skills, like **language**, develop quickly as children grow. That means a 5 year old and a 5 and a half year old may have very different abilities.

To make fair comparisons, scores are grouped by **age in months**, not just years. This gives a much more accurate picture of how a child is doing compared to their peers.

For example, the **Infant Language Link school entry assessment** used data from **200 children per month of age**, adding up to 2,500 children in one school term. These children were chosen to reflect the UK population in terms of gender,

ethnicity, background, and location, based on the **2021 census**.

The bell curve (normal distribution)

When we look at lots of scores, they usually follow a pattern called a **normal distribution**, or **bell curve**.

Most children score close to the average. Fewer children score very high or very low. This pattern helps us understand where a child's score sits compared to everyone else.

What is a standard score?

We measure how far a score is from the average using something called a **standard deviation**. This shows how spread out the scores are.

Standard scores range from 70 to 140 with 100 being average.

A percentile rank gives a score that shows where a child would come in relation to 100 children exactly the same age; 50 being the average.

What do these scores actually mean?

These scores give teachers and professionals a reliable way to spot needs early and offer the right support at the right time.

The Secondary Language Link assessment was standardised working with The Psychometrics Centre – University of Cambridge

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Psychometrics Centre

Secondary LanguageLink

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

The **standardised online assessment** is used to universally screen students at transition, with additional tracking of any young person where intervention was recommended.

Following assessment, individual profiles and class reports identify areas of strength and need, enabling senior leaders to set targets and develop action plans to address barriers to learning across the school.

Secondary Language Link promotes universal and targeted support. Our unique Communication Contracts enable students to take responsibility for their own learning, promoting self-advocacy and independence. Students and subject teachers use the identified strategies from the contract during whole class teaching.

The annual subscription includes CPD UK certified online training for all staff. Our **SLCN Toolkit** is a teacher training resource which examines key aspects of teaching that will support the learning and achievement of students with SLCN and those new to English. Suitable for all subject teachers, it promotes inclusion across the curriculum and can be added to staff CPD programmes.

SCAN ME

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

LETTERBOX CLUB:
instilling a love of reading
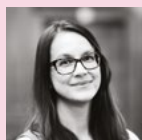
By **Arwenna Davis**, head of research and impact, BookTrust

Reading has a unique and transformative impact on attainment. It's consistently linked to stronger academic performance, and research points to reading as a powerful lever for narrowing the disadvantage gap.[1]

• Children from 'disadvantaged' backgrounds who achieve highly at the end of primary school are twice as likely to have been read to at home in their early years, compared to their peers.[1]

• Children aged 11-14 from 'disadvantaged' backgrounds who read independently and take part in other enriching home activities are more likely to achieve three or more A-levels, compared to those not engaged in these activities.[1]

> "It has helped me with my mental health."
>
> **Child aged 13 who receives Letterbox Club**

• By age 16, reading for pleasure is a much stronger predictor of progress in vocabulary, mathematics and spelling than parental education.[1]

Instilling a love of reading is a pathway to unlocking a whole range of benefits for students, including those with speech, language and communication needs.

Teachers play a vital role in engaging students in reading for pleasure. BookTrust research with 8,000 teachers found that over 70% of secondary school teachers were concerned about students' levels of reading enjoyment. The need to overcome this challenge, so young people don't miss out on the benefits, is becoming increasingly urgent.[2]

Letterbox Club parcels are designed to be taken home by pupils to encourage a love of reading. Agency is a key part of building young readers' motivation and identity. Agency comes through ownership of books, access to a range of titles to explore what kinds of books they like and positive reinforcement. These are key ingredients in building a reader, and this is what Letterbox Club aims to do.

Children receive one parcel per month, but schools can distribute them however works best for the students they support. Some schools use the resource one-to-one or in small groups before sending the parcels home for the students to keep. This works well, as the aim is for the children who receive the parcels to feel special. It's important that receiving the parcels feels celebratory for them. Schools are free to use the Letterbox Club resources as flexibly as they like to meet the needs of the students and their families.

Our speech and language therapists here at Speech & Language Link say:

"Sharing these books either individually or as a group prior to them being sent home is a great idea and can support students with SLCN in many ways.

"Not only does shared reading support vocabulary growth, exposure to well-formed sentence structure and narrative skills, it offers students more opportunities to develop skills such as comprehension monitoring, critical thinking skills such as prediction, inference and analysis, and can encourage students to develop important oracy skills such as expressing opinions, listening to others, turn taking and asking questions in a safe and supportive environment."

For students who may need extra support with literacy, it is vital books are both engaging and build confidence. The Letterbox Club selection panel takes into consideration that many of the children who receive Letterbox Club parcels may have different reading abilities. Books for the programme are selected with this in mind, considering text level, clarity and accessibility of layout, alongside interesting themes, relatable characters, and age-appropriateness.

Schools tell us they buy for various reasons, not just to support reading for pleasure but also to support relationship building between the school and families and to enhance pastoral support. They buy for a range of pupils including looked-after children and children with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan.

Children taking part in Letterbox Club report enjoying reading more and feeling more confident about it: 96% say they like or love Letterbox Club and 72% say they now read more on their own.

At just £157 per child (including VAT), schools will receive six sets of Letterbox Club parcels to be gifted to individual students to be used at school and to take home. Letterbox Club can be purchased through the Pupil Premium Grant, or other funding used to support pupils from vulnerable family backgrounds or low-income households.

MORE INFO

BookTrust
Getting children reading

www.booktrust.org.uk/letterbox-Club

BookTrust is the UK's largest children's reading charity, supporting families to share stories from early childhood. We reach millions annually, especially low-income, foster, and adoptive families, bringing the magic of reading to children in every community in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

References:

1. BookTrust (2024) "The benefits of reading". Leeds: BookTrust.

2. BookTrust and Teacher Tapp (2024) Online survey of teachers in England conducted in August 2024. Unpublished data. Figures based on 2,942 primary school teachers.

welcome to The Link

Ensure everyone is on the same page when it comes to supporting SLCN this academic year.

For teachers and support staff:
The Ultimate Guide to SLCN digital handbook

Written by our specialist speech and language therapists, this handbook is the perfect starting point for supporting students with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).

It's ideal for new support staff and ECTs, whilst serving as a great refresher for experienced staff. It covers key red flags to watch for in the classroom and offers clear, practical strategies to support students with specific SLCN diagnoses.

Best of all, it's completely free when you join The Link Community.

SCAN ME
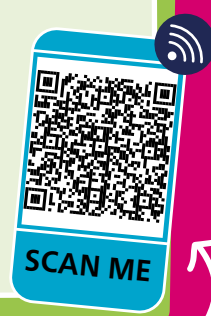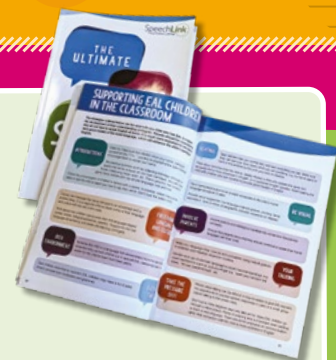
Join the Link Community here

Oracy Podcast

Our specialist speech and language therapists, Louise and Yin, were absolutely thrilled to be asked to feature on one of SENDcast's podcast episodes. They loved how relaxed the interview was and the brilliant sense of humour of their host, Dale Pickles. Louise and Yin chatted away about Oracy and the importance of a talking curriculum for all children (including those with SLCN) and provided professional and personal insights and advice to help your pupils develop a love of talking!

We do hope that you get a chance to listen to the podcast and hear Louise and Yin share their interesting takes on Oracy. We also hope that you get a chance to add some extra tools to your practice with discussions of the new talking curriculum ahead.

Here's the link for you: www.ow.ly/56be50Wr2HG

The SENDcast is a weekly podcast focusing on Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) launched by B Squared.

Keep up to date with policy changes, best practice and improve your knowledge.

With 260+ episodes and 450,000 downloads, it's proven to be a great free resource for both schools and parents.

www.thesendcast.com/sendcast-episodes

Community news

Send awareness in November

10th-14th November 2025

Anti-Bullying Week: Power for Good Secondary School & Youth Setting Pack

Kick off Anti-Bullying Week with Odd Socks Day

For SENCos

Check out the new SENCO Handbook from the team at Tes!

Download the guide to discover practical ways to reduce your workload, unlock additional funding and streamline SEND support in your school.

Dates for your diary

We're excited to be attending a range of SEND events in the new academic year. It's a great chance to connect, share ideas, and stay up to date with the latest in inclusive education – come and say hello if you're there too!

19TH NOVEMBER
The National SEND Conference 2025, London

12TH NOVEMBER
The Education People Show, Detling, Kent

27TH NOVEMBER
Surrey Schools' SEND, Conference, Epsom, Surrey