

# The Link

## PRIMARY



**CARBON  
BALANCED  
PAPER**

www.carbonbalancedpaper.com  
CBP032215

THE SPEECH & LANGUAGE MAGAZINE FOR SCHOOLS

## Meet our Little Link stars, Ben and Teddy

Adventurers on a mission  
to help nursery teams  
develop every child's  
communication skills  
Page 10

Empowering children  
and young people  
with DLD  
Page 6



ISSUE  
**33**  
2025

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



**BUILDING SKYSCRAPERS WITH  
WORDS** – an inspiring interview  
Page 4



**TALKING MATTERS** – insights  
from a Truly Great Primary Teacher  
Page 14



**THE NEW SCHOOL ENTRY  
ASSESSMENT** – within Infant  
Language Link  
Page 17

£4.95



# CONTENTS

3

**Crossword challenge**  
From One TA to another

4-5

**I will build skyscrapers  
with my words**

By Juliet Leonard and Lucy Manchester



6-7

**Empowering children and young  
people with developmental  
language disorder (DLD)**

By Becky Clark, head speech and  
language therapist at ClarkSLT

8-9

**Teaching pupils with Down  
syndrome**

By Dr Rebecca Baxter, speech and  
language therapist

10-11

**Introducing Little Link**

Our new nursery and  
pre-school package for 3-5 year olds



12-13

**Rewiring reading**

By Emma Steel, head of Every Cherry

14-15

**Talking Matters - Insights from a  
Truly Great Primary Teacher**

An interview with Molly Medhurst

16

**Ask a therapist, what is a  
standardised assessment  
and why use it?**

By Juliet Leonard, specialist speech  
and language therapist

17

**All about Infant Language  
Link and its upgraded  
school entry assessment**



18-19

**The Link Community news**

## Editor's Letter

Dear SENCo,

Welcome to the latest issue of  
**The Link** and, as always, there's  
plenty to share!

October is packed with important  
awareness events, especially for those  
of us supporting children with speech,  
language and communication needs.  
One that's particularly close to our  
hearts is **Developmental Language  
Disorder (DLD) Awareness Day**.

On page 6, **Becky Clark**, Campaign  
Co-Founder of RADLD, shares  
powerful insights on how we can  
better empower children with DLD in  
our schools and settings.

We recently asked our speech and  
language therapists what their  
number one message to schools  
would be at this time of year. Their  
response was clear:

**Screen your new intake for speech  
and language difficulties!**

And we're excited to help you do  
just that. Our *new* and *improved*  
School Entry Assessment from **Infant  
Language Link** is now quicker, more  
accurate, and even easier to use;  
perfect for screening your Year R/P1  
pupils. Learn more on page 17.

And that's not all...

We're thrilled to introduce **Little Link**:  
our much-anticipated early years  
language screener and intervention  
package. Designed for nursery and  
pre-school settings, it's available now  
for trial or purchase. Turn to page 10  
to find out how this tool can support  
earlier identification and intervention  
where it matters most.

In this issue, we're also shining a  
light on individual experiences. On  
page 4, **Lucy Manchester**, a creative  
pupil with SLCN, shares how art and  
therapy help them manage their  
stammer and word-finding difficulties,  
while advocating for empathy and  
understanding. And on page 14, don't  
miss our interview with the inspiring  
**Molly Medhurst**, who shares what  
motivates her to be a "Truly Great  
Primary Teacher".

For something a bit more interactive,  
why not test your knowledge with  
our **TA crossword**? You'll find it on  
the opposite page – and if you enter,  
you could win one of five sets of our  
colourful reward stickers!

**Finally, a quick note: from next  
summer, we'll be changing the  
way we distribute printed copies  
of The Link. To keep receiving your  
school's termly issue (and to access  
a host of free SLCN resources) make  
sure you're signed up to our Link  
Community. Full details are on  
page 18.**

Wishing you a fantastic and fulfilling  
term ahead!

Claire Chambers

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



### Little Link stickers giveaway

We are giving away the gorgeous new Ben &  
Teddy stickers to the first 20 free trial signups for  
Little Link. See page 19 for more details.



Social media: @ Speech & Language Link

Instagram: @speechandlanguageLink

**speechandlanguage.link**

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



# CROSSWORD CHALLENGE

— Can you find the secret word?

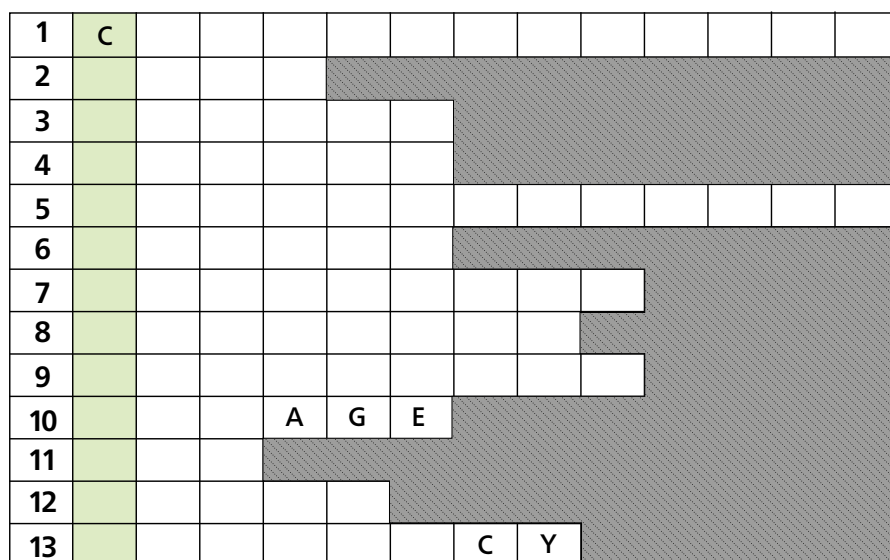
TAs, why not have a go at our crossword and see if you can work out the secret word hidden in green by solving the clues?

We're giving away 5 sets of our fantastic sticker sheets! They're perfect for rewarding intervention work and reminding staff and parents of the skills the child has been working on.

To be in with a chance of winning, just solve the puzzle and email the secret word to:  
[claire.chambers@speechlink.co.uk](mailto: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...



## Clues (across):

- Another term for receptive language, starting with **C** (13)
- A type of question that gets a child talking (4)
- Working \_\_\_\_\_ difficulties can have implications for language processing (6)
- Children with this phobia struggle to talk in certain situations: selective \_\_\_\_\_ (6)
- See Clue 1: *Another* word for this. Language difficulties of this type are hard to spot in the classroom by observation alone (13)
- Labelling objects (6)
- Speech sounds uttered alone are said in \_\_\_\_\_ (9)
- Breaking down sentences into parts to support understanding (8)
- This focus-related skill provides a solid foundation for speech and language development (9)
- \_\_\_\_\_ **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)
- Known as 'key words'. Number of words that carry the information necessary for understanding (1,1,1)
- Syntax is related to the \_\_\_\_\_ of words (5)
- \_\_\_\_\_ **cy**, the ability to understand and work with numbers, relies heavily on language skills (8)

# I will build SKYSCRAPERS with my words



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



I am fortunate as a speech and language therapist to meet many amazing children with speech, language and communication needs, who share fascinating insights into their difficulties and the way they feel about them, leaving me in awe of their eloquence, creativity and resilience.

Lucy Manchester is one such child. During a visit to a primary school in Kent, the SENCo proudly pointed out a masterpiece, displayed in prime position. It featured repeated letters on stunning feather-like extensions of a face, surrounded by pastel colours and small images. A card beside it read: **"By Lucy Manchester. Inspired by my Speech and Language Therapy sessions."**

I had to know more – and was delighted when Lucy agreed to an interview about their art and SLCN journey, for The Link magazine.

Lucy has difficulties storing and retrieving vocabulary and a stammer

which has been present for 8 years. Here, Lucy offers a unique insight into self-perception, the value of support, and how they use their creativity to express their SLCN journey.

## **Tell me about why you created this fantastic piece of art...**

*"It was art week at school, and we were asked to create an abstract piece of art that told a story, drawing inspiration from an artist. I was inspired by Gerard Di-Maccio as his portraits looked so detailed, but also so simple. My decision to base it around my speech and language sessions was immediate."*

Stammered words are an integral detail to the piece that Lucy has created. *"Stammering is engraved in my memory. And these are memories, coming out of my brain."*

Lucy added, *"I feel like (SLCN) is basically like a big part of me. Like 8 slices of cake and 2 slices of just me. I think it's because how long I have had it for"*

Lucy went on to share some of the key elements from their speech and language sessions, and how they use these to retrieve words, in school and in everyday life. *"We talked about the storage of everything and how we can put our words into categories, like vehicles go in transport. This really helped me to find words."*

Lucy noted that, whilst sounds in a word help them to shortlist the word they are looking for, it is the meaning connections that have helped the most:

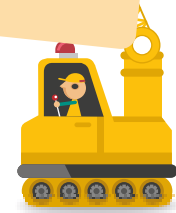
*"I think it's easier to categorise and take it down step by step. So, if I'm thinking of like a type of cheese, I'll put it in the 'food' category, and sort it down by colours, and by things I have tried recently."* Similarly, *"When I was trying to remember a character from a show a few days ago, I put the words in 'shows that I have watched recently' and took it down step by step."*

Topic-based, more specific vocabulary is a little trickier, but Lucy can cue-





Please email us at:  
**helpdesk@speechlink.co.uk**  
if you have a student who would  
like to share their SLCN story with  
a wider audience.



# Empowering children and young people with **DEVELOPMENTAL LANGUAGE DISORDER (DLD)**

By **Becky Clark**, head speech and language therapist at ClarkSLT, RADLD Campaign Co-Founder, Fellow of RCSLT

For children 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 the 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, 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 crucial so that children with DLD can consciously select from the tools available.

### APPROACHES

#### Modelling

- Say when you are finding 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'll read that again slowly" or "I can't remember the word, so 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 to practise a specific target.
- With the child's involvement, transfer helpful visuals to the classroom to support carry over.

#### 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

Awareness of their own profile can help children with DLD to make sense of their daily language challenges and feel understood; and support self-image and their view of themselves as a learner.

### APPROACHES

#### Validating differences

- Educate all children about differences in how we learn and communicate and relate these to wider concepts of diversity.
- Provide opportunities for staff or students to talk about their own differences to the children.
- Access the free 'Learning About Neurodiversity at School' programme: [www.salvesen-research.ed.ac.uk/leans](http://www.salvesen-research.ed.ac.uk/leans)

#### Understanding of themselves

- Support the child with DLD to understand their strengths as well as the difficulties

they experience with words. See the 'DLD and Me' website: [www.dldandme.co.uk](http://www.dldandme.co.uk)

- Parental involvement is essential, along with a sensitive, individualised approach.

#### Families

- Offer DLD discussion sessions for parents/carers including how to talk about the child's language difficulties at home.
- Signpost to free 'DLD Together' courses offered by Afasic: [www.afasic.org.uk](http://www.afasic.org.uk) and NAPLIC: [www.naplic.org.uk](http://www.naplic.org.uk)



## Self-Advocacy

Children 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 child to explain DLD or to describe their challenges with talking and understanding in their own way.

#### Media representation

- Use films/books about figures who experience difficulties understanding and

talking, to look at the character profiles and the strategies they use.

- Resources include: RADLD video clips [www.youtube.com/RADLD](http://www.youtube.com/RADLD); 'Oscar Finds the Treasure' [www.cogmazepublishing.com](http://www.cogmazepublishing.com); 'Meet DLD', and 'Dan and the Paper Airplane: Living Life with DLD'. Children can create their own stories related to DLD through words, art, poetry or videos.

### 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 children 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.

# Teaching pupils with Down syndrome



By **Dr Rebecca Baxter**, speech and language therapist specialising in working with children and young adults with Down syndrome.

When a pupil with Down syndrome joins your school, it presents a valuable opportunity to strengthen inclusive practice. While each pupil is unique, there is a well-evidenced learning profile associated with Down syndrome that can help inform effective teaching and successful inclusion.

## The learning profile

Children with Down syndrome have an intellectual disability, with most children experiencing moderate cognitive impairments. However, not all areas of development are equally impacted:

Strengths	Challenges
Visual short-term memory	Hearing and vision
Social understanding and social skills	Verbal short-term memory and auditory processing
Self-help and daily living skills	Speech, language and communication
	Fine and gross motor skills

## Speech, language and communication needs (SLCN)

**Supporting communication is central to a successful school experience.** Pupils with Down syndrome are typically keen to communicate with others and want to interact with peers.

However, SLCN difficulties are associated with Down syndrome. Characteristically, children have stronger receptive than expressive language, with a relative strength in receptive vocabulary. Difficulties with speech sounds and pragmatic difficulties are also common.

## The classroom

Inclusion goes far beyond curriculum access. Pupils need to feel emotionally safe, valued, and part of their peer group. Children should be working in the classroom, alongside their peers for the majority of all lessons, with some small group and 1:1 sessions as/ if required. Additional supports and resources will be needed to ensure children can be successfully involved at break, lunchtime and clubs.

Ensuring an understanding of Down syndrome for staff and peers and how to support all pupils in the class can be beneficial. This might involve reading inclusive storybooks, leading circle time discussions, or getting involved in fundraising campaigns such as **World Down Syndrome Day** and October Awareness Month.

## STRATEGIES

### Know the learning profile

If staff are aware of the specific difficulties and strengths for children with Down syndrome, they will be able to review the lesson plan and adapt as required e.g., preparing a second copy of resources to support input, simplifying text, increasing font size, allowing extra time for processing, modelling activities and using visual support. Providing visuals to support expressive language and speech difficulties will benefit the child and give context for others.

### Set clear targets

Targets may be around academic learning or around social skills,





independence or interaction with peers. Individual targets can help to meaningfully measure progress. Vocabulary targets can be used to work on useful everyday vocabulary (e.g., first, last, carpet, lining up, assembly) and/or specific vocabulary about a topic (e.g., fire, London, bakery, street).

### Consider speech, language and communication demands

Ensure language is simplified as needed – both the vocabulary and the length and complexity of information. All verbal information is going to be challenging, especially listening times. Ensure adult support does not just repeat verbal information but supports it visually – with demonstration,

pictures, words, signs as appropriate. Supports should be in place throughout the school day. Expressive support may include pictures to show peers their hobbies, interests and news to more formal sentence strips, question starters and/or AAC aids.

### Use adult support effectively

It is important that adults promote interaction and do not isolate the pupil from peers. Sitting alongside good role models of learning behaviour and skills is beneficial. Adults should step in only when needed.

### Review regularly

Regularly review the classroom/task to ensure everything needed is in place. A

checklist can remind staff and provide a quick reference tool. This may include positioning (sat at the front, clearly see the teacher and board, sat next to a peer, feet flat on the floor), resources (pupil can independently access, visual task/job list, text is clear and at the correct font size) and task (clear learning objective(s), clear independent element(s), recording amount and type of support).

You can find out more information about Down syndrome, the training, support and resources available to schools at [downsyndromeuk.co.uk/education-professionals/primary-education-programme](http://downsyndromeuk.co.uk/education-professionals/primary-education-programme)



### Author

Dr Rebecca Baxter is an experienced speech and language therapist that has specialised in working with children and young adults with Down syndrome since 2007. She has primarily worked in school settings helping hundreds of children in practical settings. Her work as Director of Education & Speech and Language Therapy at Down Syndrome UK now includes the development and delivery of nationwide education programmes helping to bring her knowledge and skills to the whole of the UK!

### Primary Education Programme

For just £100 your school (unlimited staff) can join our Primary Education Programme for 12 months. Our programme offers a range of videos and resources that can be accessed at your own pace – all aimed at helping create an inclusive learning environment, ensuring your pupil with Down syndrome gets the best possible outcomes in each subject.



SCAN ME



## Little Link — 3-5 year olds

Little Link is our exciting new pre-school package. Designed by speech and language therapists, Little Link helps Early Years providers to support the best possible speech, language and communication development for preschool children.



### ENGAGE AND IDENTIFY

Our engaging, story-based, standardised screening tool takes around 10 minutes to complete and delivers instant feedback, allowing your staff to identify children who need a little more support with their language development and to help you make the best use of your local specialist services where they are really needed.

### ACTIVITY-BASED INTERVENTIONS

- Based around six unique stories, our interventions introduce target language skills, concepts and vocabulary in a familiar and enjoyable format.
- Each book comes complete with a series of planned play-based activities to practise and consolidate a range of important language skills.
- Sessions are designed to take place throughout the whole setting, rather than a small group format,

which means they don't require any additional staff or space, and every child benefits—and we mean *every child!*

### INCLUSIVITY IS KEY

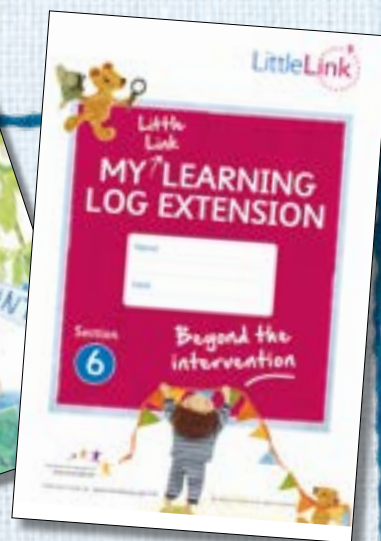
Our 'built-in, not bolt-on' method is based on the principle of inclusivity and our whole school approach. This encourages every child to participate, including those with additional needs and children who are learning English as an additional language.

## Over 250

HAND-CRAFTED ILLUSTRATIONS  
WERE MADE BY HANNAH  
SANGUINETTI



- ✓ Six unique stories target language skills, concepts and vocabulary in a familiar and fun way.



- ✓ Our focus on books and a phonological awareness activity supports early pre-literacy skills so that children are school-ready.



## KEY FEATURES

- ✓ Story-based, child-friendly, yet robust and objective standardised language assessment
- ✓ Train your whole workforce with the comprehensive Toolkit and Learning Log
- ✓ Universal language enrichment programme, so that every child can benefit
- ✓ Works both as a 'stand-alone' or integrated with Infant Language Link as children move up to Reception



Flexible and adaptable, the sessions work well in a range of settings, including those that emphasise child-led learning. They provide opportunities to focus on improving the quality of adult-child interactions, which has a huge impact on language outcomes. In this way every session supports early pre-literacy skills so that children are school-ready when the time comes.

## IN-PACKAGE TRAINING AND SUPPORT

We're here to help you make the most out of Little Link. With simple User Guides, resources and complete SLCN training for your whole team, we've got everything you need to get started and feel confident. Plus, if you ever need expert advice about a child, our specialist speech and language therapists are just a phone call or email away, ready to offer their expertise.



## SUBSCRIPTION FEE

A Little Link subscription allows you to carry out unlimited assessments and interventions, representing outstanding value for money.

**Annual subscription £300+VAT (introductory offer)**



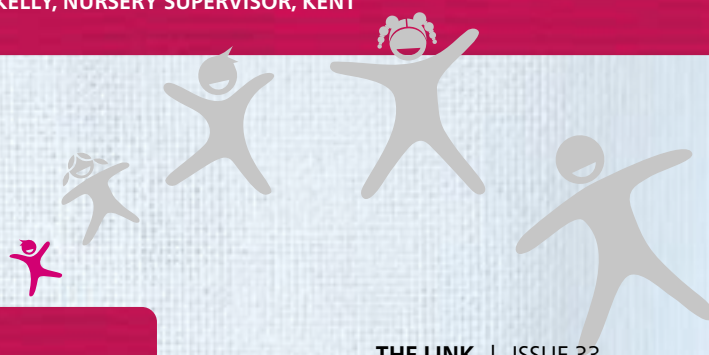
**FREE  
TRIAL**



“

We have really enjoyed working with the Little Link assessment and intervention. It has had a positive impact on our children who really enjoyed the stories and activities... Little Link was easy to use and implement, especially with the lesson plans and guides. The use of resources, that had been designed around what we already have in the nursery, made things easy to put together and use.”

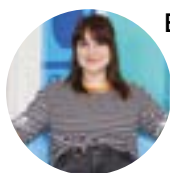
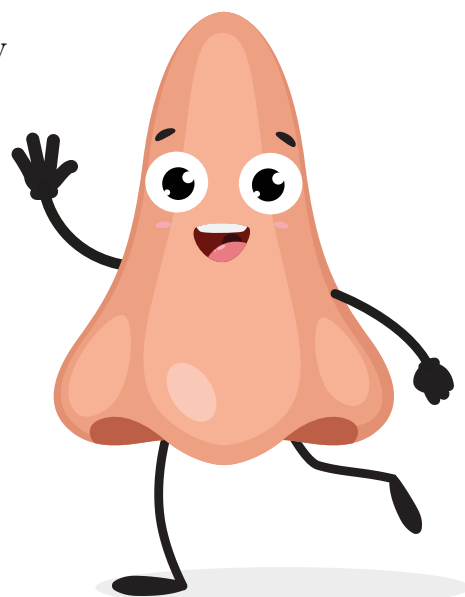
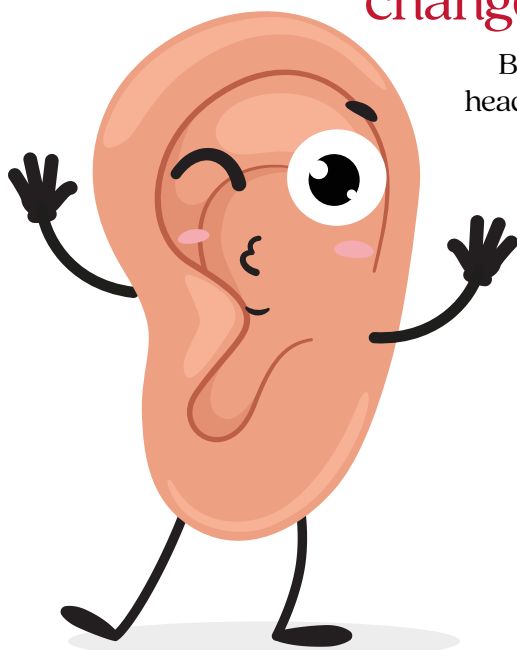
**KELLY, NURSERY SUPERVISOR, KENT**





## Why sensory storytelling changes everything

By Emma Steel,  
head of Every Cherry



Enjoying reading is not always about reading words on a page. For many learners with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), it can't be.

In classrooms across the country, teachers are being asked to engage young readers using traditional methods, methods that often assume reading happens primarily through print. But what if, for some children, that assumption excludes the very act of engagement?

Recent National Literacy Trust research states that *"young people's reading enjoyment and daily reading frequency have fallen to their lowest levels since the charity began tracking them 20 years ago"*. Reading offers

more than just knowledge—it opens the door to escape, empathy, creativity, and so much more. The benefits of reading are endless, yet many people struggle with the pure act of reading. Imagine struggling to escape into the wonderful worlds of some of our favourite books.

Perhaps we need to readdress what we truly mean by 'enjoying reading'. Is it the act of decoding words on a page? Are we measuring reading enjoyment through children reading chapter books? If we are measuring reading as a skill, perhaps a re-

evaluation of what reading actually is needs to be addressed.

At Every Cherry, we believe reading is not just a skill. It's a sensory, emotional and neurological journey. It's an opportunity for people to lose themselves in the magic of the world created, whether seated in fantasy or reality. For children with complex needs, whether they're recovering from trauma, managing developmental conditions or navigating language processing differences, reading must start somewhere far deeper than decoding.





Sensory storytelling offers that beginning.

Rooted in early childhood development theory, sensory storytelling uses tactile, auditory, visual and movement-based inputs to construct meaning. It allows children to experience a story before they interpret it. Real-life objects, soundscapes, smells and textured materials aren't gimmicks; they're neural scaffolds and supportive structures that create and reinforce the pathways needed for future literacy.

For children with SLCN, who may have difficulty sequencing events, recognising abstract symbols or retaining spoken instructions, the immediacy of sensory input is transformative. A textured scarf that represents a cloak; a mint scent to evoke a forest; a rhythmic drumbeat to represent footsteps. These tools allow children to access narratives on their own terms, in their own way.

Yet, despite growing awareness, many teachers still hesitate to move away from a sole focus on the printed page. There's a quiet fear: "Is this really reading?" Our answer is an unequivocal, indisputable "Yes!".

Reading is the extraction of meaning from written language. Sensory

storytelling does precisely that – just in a more inclusive, immersive way. It builds the cognitive and emotional foundations for later decoding, comprehension and vocabulary acquisition.

Not only that, but sensory storytelling can also develop a love for books in children who may otherwise be unable to access the written word. Sensory storytelling provides avenues for children to explore setting, character, adventure and, above all, fun! Through the catalysts of the senses, sensory storytelling can take children on a journey of discovery whilst also providing new experiences and learning.

For children with SLCN, it's not just a creative option. It's a necessary one.

Sensory storytelling is just the beginning of making reading accessible and inclusive. The possibilities for different forms of reading are endless, and making sure every child can experience the magic of books is imperative and a key part of our mission.

And it's not about simplification - it's about access. When we access stories through touch, through rhythm, through interaction, we're not diluting a story. We're enriching it.

Moreover, sensory storytelling opens doors for equality in the classroom. This form of reading enhances comprehension and retention by creating vivid and engaging experiences through every day, ordinary objects. Whether children require sensory storytelling techniques for their own neurological development, or solely for fun, this approach to reading can have a place in every classroom. In turn, elevating inclusivity and equality; a notion that Every Cherry will champion.

Perhaps most importantly, sensory storytelling restores a sense of joy. At a time when the national data on reading for pleasure is sobering, approaches that invite children in, on their terms, are not just welcome. They are vital.

Sensory storytelling is enriching as it mirrors the way that we, as humans, experience life in all its forms. Through scent, we can be transported to a bakery, through touch, a forest or through sight, a magical Christmas Eve. It transforms abstract ideas into real life, tangible experiences, again injecting joy and fun into the experience of reading.

Ultimately, if we want to include every cherry on the tree, we need to remember that literacy doesn't always start with letters. Sometimes, it starts with a feather, a bell or a splash of water.



Every Cherry is an award-winning imprint of Sweet Cherry Publishing, bringing high quality reading material to people with a range of learning disabilities and difficulties.

Find out more at: [www.everycherry.com](http://www.everycherry.com)

# TALKING



We spoke to the lovely Molly Medhurst, a Year 5 teacher at The Ridgeway Primary School, Reading. Featured in John Tomsett's book, 'This Much I Know About Truly Great Primary Teachers', Molly is praised for her thoughtful, child-centred approach.

Here, she shares her experiences and thoughts on language and learning and how she ensures her pupils are heard.

**1** You've been recognised as a 'Truly Great Primary Teacher'. What does great teaching mean to you, and where does oral language fit into that picture?

At the heart of great teaching, I believe, is the ability to build and maintain strong and meaningful relationships with your pupils. In my classroom, I want every child to feel valued, respected and excited to be in school. When this kind of bond is formed, children begin to see the value in themselves and feel believed in and so it pushes them to achieve great things. For me, oral language is undeniably fundamental to building these relationships and unlocking their potential.





# MATTERS

## - Insights from a Truly Great Primary Teacher

### 2 What's something you've learnt about children and oral language that you feel would be useful for all teachers to know?

That talking is a good thing! While there are times where the classroom does need to be quiet, a noisy classroom is a good thing if it's purposeful. Some of the best work has come from moments when children were given the opportunity to communicate and collaborate. Talking allows for ideas to be shared and developed and offers a chance for peer support.

### 3 Can you tell us about a moment when a child's difficulties with communication made you rethink and adapt your approach?

One child in particular comes to mind here. They would often become tearful or visibly frustrated but just could never verbally communicate what was wrong. I introduced a lot of non-verbal communication forms into the classroom. They had a 'help me' card which they could show if something was becoming difficult, access to an emotions mat to show how they were feeling throughout the day and a toolkit with different methods of regulating on it which they would use if they were feeling heightened. They soon could

verbally explain what was going on as they knew they would be listened to and supported when feeling a certain emotion. They still now have access to the non-verbal prompts if they need to use them, so if they are struggling to articulate their emotions, there is no pressure.

### 4 How do you bring oracy into your classroom practice, and what do you think makes it truly effective?

Our school has been making a conscious effort to incorporate oracy into the curriculum. In Year 5, we have incorporated a lesson into our Amazon Rainforest topic where children debate whether deforestation should be allowed. In our art lessons, I will end every lesson with some form of verbal evaluation where children express their thoughts about their own or someone else's artwork. These are just two examples, but the same is being built in across the whole school curriculum.

### 5 If we stepped into your classroom, what would we see in terms of talking and listening?

Each morning, I greet the children and give them an opportunity to share anything they wish to with

me. Throughout the day, plenty of opportunities for partner work using 'Think, Pair, Share' would be built in and children would be constantly sharing ideas with their learning partner. The 'Think' part is crucial here as it reduces anxiety for those who find speaking more daunting.

You'd hear sentence stems and vocabulary banks being modelled and referred to and the children feeling confident in using them. You'd see children using talking time effectively and taking advantage of the opportunity to share their fantastic ideas. Ultimately, I'd hope you'd see a room full of children who know that their voice and their opinion is valued.

### 6 Why does supporting children's oral language matter so much to you, not just as a teacher, but as a person?

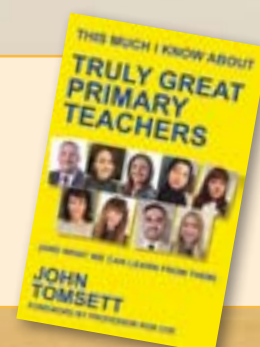
Everyone deserves the chance to express themselves and share their thoughts and feelings. By ensuring that oral language is modelled well and that we put the right support in place for those who may find it trickier, we are not only building them up for academic success, but also social and emotional success.

TO READ  
THE FULL  
INTERVIEW



SCAN  
ME

Find out more about Molly and other outstanding teachers in John Tomsett's celebration of educational practice. *'This Much I Know About Truly Great Primary Teachers'* is available to buy on...  
[www.tinyurl.com/y5xkpmra](http://www.tinyurl.com/y5xkpmra)



# ASK A Therapist

## What is a standardised assessment and why use it?



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

**A**

A **standardised assessment** 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?

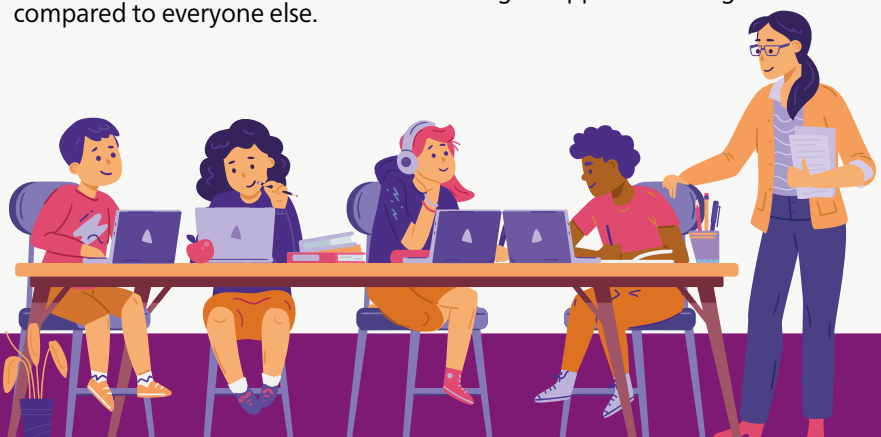
We measure how far a score is from the average using something called a **standard deviation**. This shows how spread out the scores are.

**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?

In a standardised assessment, there's no **pass or fail**. These scores give teachers and professionals a reliable way to spot needs early and offer the right support at the right time.





# INFANT LanguageLink

NEW!



## SCHOOL ENTRY ASSESSMENT

The fastest, most accurate, standardised assessment for understanding of language on school entry

- ✓ Upwards of 50% of children, particularly in areas of social disadvantage, are starting school with below average language skills.
- ✓ School attendance alone does not improve these skills and difficulties are likely to persist throughout their education.
- ✓ Difficulty understanding spoken language is a 'hidden' need, impossible to identify from observation alone, with many children being missed or misidentified.

Schools face a significant challenge in effectively supporting children with speech, language, and communication needs (SLCN). Research consistently highlights the far-reaching impact of poor oral language skills on literacy, academic performance, behaviour, and school attendance.

That's why it's essential for schools to have a reliable and efficient way to identify these needs as children start school, so that timely, targeted support can be put in place.

**Speech & Language Link** recommend universal screening of children on school entry, as it's the only way to identify everyone that needs support.

However, many schools tell us that they find this challenging in practice.

### We have the answer...

Two years in the making, this standardised assessment of the understanding of language builds on the detail and accuracy our Infant Language Link subscribers know so well. **We've significantly reduced the time it takes to screen the average class and made the school entry assessment even more accurate in identifying language difficulties; making this important task much easier.**

**Experience the assessment for yourself by taking a free trial!**

### REDUCED SCREENING TIME

2 out of 3 children in an average Reception/P1 class will complete the new screen in only 10 minutes.

### IMPROVED PROGRESS MEASURES

The additional assessment allows schools to accurately track a child's progress from the beginning to the end of the school year.



**FREE TRIAL**



## Have you joined yet?

As a Link Community member, you will have access to a wide range of high-quality, practical resources to support the development of speech, language and communication skills. Here's what's included:

- 👍 The Ultimate Guide to SLCN (eBook)
- 👍 Our SLCN Blog
- 👍 The monthly newsletter
- 👍 The latest podcast from our specialist speech and language therapy team
- 👍 On-demand sessions from The Link Live Speech & Language Day 2024

What's not to love - join here - it's FREE



## 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!

3RD OCTOBER

**National Education Show, Cardiff**

10TH - 11TH OCTOBER

**Tes SEND Show 2025, London**

12TH NOVEMBER

**The Education People Show, Detling, Kent**

27TH NOVEMBER

**Surrey Schools' SEND, Conference, Epsom, Surrey**

## SEND awareness in October

October is full of important SEND awareness days that give us a great opportunity to reflect on how we support children with speech, language, and communication needs. These needs can often be hidden, but they have a big impact on how children learn, take part in class, and build friendships. Awareness days like these remind us to think about the way we use language, how we encourage talking and listening, and how we support children who find communication more challenging. Even small changes can help create a more inclusive environment where every child feels understood, included, and able to thrive.

This October, the following are in the spotlight:

- ADHD Awareness Month
  - Selective Mutism Awareness Month
  - Down Syndrome Awareness Month
  - Dyslexia Awareness Week (6–12 October)
  - Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) Awareness Day (Friday 17 October)
- Learn more: [www.radld.org](http://www.radld.org)



## 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)



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

Join the conversation with 4k 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.





## International school spotlight

Nicola Daly, EAL Teacher, British International School Jeddah

### Infant Language Link

At our international school, many children speak English in class but are immersed in other languages at home. While they may seem fluent, gaps in understanding can go unnoticed. To address this, we use **Infant Language Link** to screen all Reception pupils on entry, helping us identify speech and language needs early—even in children who mask their difficulties.

We've embedded high-quality teaching strategy posters in every classroom to support consistent practice, including slowing speech, repetition and visual aids. Sharing assessment results with parents has been vital, supported by the Parent Portal and regular workshops.

The interventions are short, engaging, and child-friendly, making them ideal for young learners. We've seen improvements in language skills, confidence, focus, and behaviour. Even older pupils benefit from strategies like discreet thumbs-up/down cues.

Infant Language Link is a simple, effective tool that supports early intervention—ensuring all learners get the help they need from the start.



## School Spotlight

### Little Link stickers giveaway

We're so **excited** about our brand new **Little Link stickers** — and we want to share the fun with you!

Be one of the **first 20 schools** to sign up for a **FREE Trial**, and we'll send you a couple of sheets to enjoy with your kids — absolutely **FREE!**

Just make sure to mention **The Link magazine** when you sign up, so we can send your sticker set your way. Don't miss out — they're super lovely and going fast!

LittleLink



### Working together to safeguard children

Produced by the Government this illustrated guide explains how different people and organisations can help with the safeguarding of your pupils.

Download here:





SCREEN LANGUAGE IN JUST  
10 MINUTES? THAT'S CHILD'S PLAY.

# YOU SPOKE. WE LISTENED. THEN MADE ASSESSING FASTER.

**NEW!**

Introducing the **NEW School Entry Assessment** – a smarter, faster way to assess language understanding at school entry.

## What's changed?

After two years of development and feedback from professionals like you, we've radically evolved our standardised assessment to meet the real challenges of school entry language screening.

### 👍 **Faster screening**

We know that screening every child in Year R/P1 can be tough. Now, 2 out of 3 children can complete the test in just 10 minutes.

### 👍 **Progress tracking made easy**

You asked for more ways to assess progress. Our new second screener allows you to compare performance at the start and end of the year with confidence.

### 👍 **Support that stays with you**

Expect comprehensive User Guides, training webinars and access to our specialist Help Desk throughout the year.

Find out more  
and take a  
**free TRIAL** here:



THE FASTEST, MOST ACCURATE, STANDARDISED ASSESSMENT  
FOR UNDERSTANDING OF LANGUAGE ON SCHOOL ENTRY.