



SUPPORTING LANGUAGE FOR SCHOOL READINESS

"The Labour Government has set a target for 75% of children to start school ready to learn by 2028 – an increase from around 68% currently."

Give every child the best start in life, DfE, 2025



OUR SURVEY SAID...

We asked 10 teachers what key things they wanted to see in children who were starting their Reception year.

What do you think they said?

Write down the top 3.

OUR SURVEY SAID....

- 1 Are toilet trained
- 2 Can put their shoes on
- 3 Can put their coat on
- 4 Can recognise their name
- 5 Can feed themselves with cutlery

WHAT DO YOU NOTICE ABOUT THE SKILLS PRIORITISED?

- Emphasis on motor skills
- Emphasis on independence
- Tasks that require 1:1 adult support are prioritised *unconsciously*
- Our understanding of 'school ready' is wide and varied
- Language isn't *necessarily* the first thing that comes to mind

OUR SURVEY RESPONSES DIDN'T JUST TALK ABOUT INDEPENDENCE

- Can share and take turns
- Can ask for help
- Can separate from their parents
- Can count to 10
- Can listen to an instruction



WHAT DO PARENTS SAY?

9/10 parents surveyed by Kindred Squared this year said they thought their child was ready for school, while according to teachers, only 1/3 children were actually ready.

Lack of clarity around what 'school ready' means, and how this is measured.



DEMYSTIFYING SCHOOL READINESS

The new definition lists recommendations in four categories for children arriving at Reception, to help them develop a range of abilities and the confidence to get off to a flying start, they are:

- Growing independence
- **Building relationships and communication**
- Physical development
- Healthy routines



Listening and engaging:

- Paying attention to adult direction for short periods.
- Listening to and following simple instructions

Speaking:

- Expressing that they need help
- Talking to other about activities and experiences

Speech and phonological Awareness:

- Singing along to songs and nursery rhymes

Being with others


- Starting to share and take turns
- Talking about how they feel and why.
- Beginning to recognise what others feel.
- Setting boundaries for themselves
- Bouncing back when things go wrong

LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS OF CHILDREN TRANSITIONING INTO RECEPTION

Understanding:

- Responding to questions
- Grasping new vocabulary

LANGUAGE UNDERPINS ALL SCHOOL-READY TASKS



Concepts:

- wet/dry
- full/empty
- dirty/clean

Verbs:

- need
- go
- sit
- run!

Negatives:

- don't
- can't

Sequences & positions:

- on
- in
- first
- next

Emotions:


- sad
- happy

HOW CAN EARLY YEARS SETTINGS SUPPORT CHILDREN'S COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN PREPARATION FOR SCHOOL?

1. You make the difference
2. Include every child
3. Make it fit
4. Spark curiosity
5. Share your strategy
6. Think "school ready"
7. Include families



WHAT IS **LittleLink**?



Speech & Language Link's new training, assessment and universal intervention package for 3-5-year-olds.

Designed by speech and language therapists.

KEY COMPONENTS OF



- Universal screening tool to screen all **3-5 year olds** in your setting.
- Language enrichment programme designed to **boost the language skills** of **every child** in the setting.
- Toolkit to **develop staff knowledge** and skills.
- Support for **families**.
- Track and monitor **progress**.
- Generate **reports**.



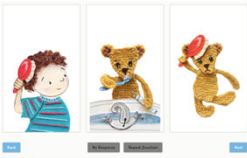
THE TOOLKIT

The training toolkit explores:

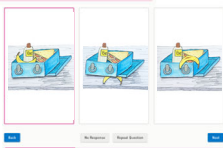
- The development of speech, language and communication skills.
- The communication-supportive setting: physical environment and communication opportunities.
- Key strategies that adults can use to support language development.
- The Little Link assessment and intervention.
- Using the Little Link model to create language-focussed sessions centred around other books.



THE LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT



- Story-based standardised screening tool.
- 10-15 minutes to complete.
- Can be used with all the children in the setting, including multilingual learners and those who have SLCN.



THE INTERVENTION

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Story week:

- Story and language targets are introduced.
- Detailed session plans and printable resources provided.

Make it stick week:

- Revisit target words and concepts covered in story week to help make the words 'stick'.
- Less structured – Guidance provided. Setting makes their own decisions about what they want to include.

Book 1		Book 2		Book 3		Book 4		Book 5		Book 6	
Story week	Make it stick week	Story week	Make it stick week	Story week	Make it stick week	Story week	Make it stick week	Story week	Make it stick week	Story week	Make it stick week

THE INTERVENTION: STORY WEEK

Story week:


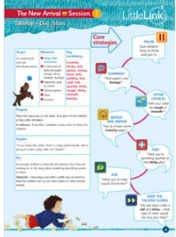
- 5 Little Link sessions, delivered daily
- The book is the focus of all 5 sessions.
- Each session lasts about 90 minutes, most of which is child led and adult supported.

Each session focuses on a key language target:

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Describing words	Emotion words	Position & sequence words	Action words	Negatives

THE INTERVENTION: STORY WEEK

Ready and To go	Resources	Preparations required
1 The story Whole group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A story book • The story outline • A selection of related paper (rough story events, items) • Equipment: stick on joints • Newspaper • Glue 	For the resources in the box, in advance if possible, complete a story poster to show the children.
2 Taboo: Dog collars Class choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dog collar templates • A selection of related paper (rough story events, items) • Equipment: stick on joints • Newspaper • Glue 	Place the resources on the table. Give each of the children a Dog collar template. An observer if possible, completes a dog collar to show the children.
3 Pretend play Home: parlour Class choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The dog and other toy parts • Home, furniture, and kitchen items 	Set up your pretend parlor in the home corner.
4 Outdoors Sensory walk Whole group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outdoor items • Sensory walk • Soft items: leaves, twigs, acorns, mud, water, grass, sand 	Set up a sensory walking track in the outside area.
5 Rhythm and rhyme time Whole group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The New Arrival story • Sound learning cards • The dog character • Storyline and stick 	Ensure the cards are ready and the box, board and toy dog available for the end of the session.





THE INTERVENTION: RESOURCES


Treasure Hunt





Can you find...



1. A ball
2. A wash
3. A brick
4. A dinosaur
5. Boots
6. A duck





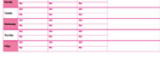
Can you make a paper tent?



First...	next...	next...	last.
			

THE INTERVENTION: MAKE IT STICK WEEK

<p>Keep the story week story in a prominent place and remind it to children if they ask for it - this could be 1-1, in small groups or with the whole class.</p>	<p>Make and share a discovery box linked to the story week story (see guidance provided).</p>	<p>Repeat some of the story week activities, or adapt them to incorporate different materials or resources (see examples provided).</p>	
<p>Set up some of your own activities linked to the theme of the story week - e.g. for Found in the Woods you could take the children on nature walk to find bugs and insects or take Ben and Teddy on an adventure to Forest School.</p>	<p>Make fiction or non-fiction books that have a similar theme to the story week - this is a great way to reinforce the key vocabulary and concepts.</p>	<p>Share the Parent Portal site with families.</p>	
<p>Choose a core strategy (or 2/3) to focus on this week. Share this with your colleagues and ask them to let you know when they spot you using it!</p>	<p>Repeat the Rhythm & Rhyme Time activities, particularly focusing on children who struggled to grasp the concepts during the story week sessions.</p>	<p>Celebrate success - nominate your Little Link legend of the week. This could be one of the children or an adult!</p>	

THE INTERVENTION: STORY WEEK

Book 1		Book 2		Book 3		Book 4		Book 5		Book 6	
Story week	Make it stick week	Story week	Make it stick week	Story week	Make it stick week	Story week	Make it stick week	Story week	Make it stick week	Story week	Make it stick week

LITTLE LINK CORE STRATEGIES

PAUSE

COMMENT

OFFER CHOICES

REPEAT & REPAIR

ADD

ASK

KEEP IT GOING

TRACKING AND MONITORING PROGRESS

Practitioner progress

Self evaluation of:

- Knowledge and understanding
- Confidence in applying this knowledge in the setting

Completed pre-toolkit, post-toolkit and post intervention.

Child progress

Functional measure of the impact of the intervention on the child's engagement and communication in the setting.

It is linked to Development Matters and looks at attention and listening skills, active involvement, phonological awareness and language skills.

Completed by key worker pre- and post-intervention.

Data pulls through to pupil and class level reports

BEYOND THE INTERVENTION

Supporting practitioners to:

- Use the Little Link Core Strategies in activities throughout the day.
- Create their own book themed sessions with activities that target an area of language.

SUPPORTING FAMILIES

Linking Families with Little Link

Talking Activities Quiz
Take the quiz to find out which activities are perfect for your child.
Quiz 1: Which one sounds most like your child?

Talking Activities
It sounds like your child will enjoy the orange activities, to help them build their talking and learn even more words, as well as listening to how words are made.

DATA AND REPORTS

Practitioners will be able to generate reports:

- Pupil report
- Class report
- Setting report

LITTLE LINK INTERVENTION PILOT

- Randomised Controlled Trial
- 24 local nurseries (Kent, Essex, London, Surrey)
- 12 x experimental settings using Little Link
- 12 x control settings (business as usual)
- Measuring the following pre and post:
 - Child language skills
 - Child school readiness
 - Staff knowledge and confidence in supporting SLCN



FEEDBACK

Hello I'm **Adam James** I work as a preschool manager at a primary school on the Kent coast. We're a 4-form entry primary school with a very diverse cohort.

It's been very **easy** to use. It's slipped very easily into our day-to-day routine.

My name is **Kelly Harris** a nursery supervisor here in a school on the East Kent coast.

You could really see even in just one session how **positive** it was for the children

We got quite a lot of **positive feedback from the families**

I think our children who have the most language have benefited from it just as much as the children with no language coming in

It **just works for everybody** that it's not necessary the children that have the language difficulties that need this, even the ones you wouldn't necessarily worry about

It's really helped to develop me as a practitioner because I feel like I'm embedding that language a lot more, rather than the ad hoc bits because its just there every day and we're doing it every day, that language is coming out all the time and it **just becomes automatic** - more automatic than what I was doing before.

LITTLE LINK & SCHOOL READINESS

1. You make the difference
 2. Include every child
 3. Make it fit
 4. Spark curiosity
 5. Share your strategy
 6. Think 'school ready'
 7. Include families
- Comprehensive staff training
 - Whole class assessment and intervention
 - Flexible – can be adapted to your setting
 - Child-led activities
 - Focus language target for each day
 - Core strategies, with guidance for how to use them
 - Family focused resources





Communication and Language
 The development of children's spoken **language underpins all seven areas of learning and development**. Children's back-and-forth interactions from an early age form the foundations for language and cognitive development.

The number and quality of the conversations they have with adults and peers throughout the day in a **language-rich environment** is crucial. By commenting on what children are interested in or doing, and echoing back what they say with new vocabulary added, practitioners will build children's language effectively.

Reading frequently to children, and engaging them actively in stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems, and then providing them with extensive opportunities to use and embed new words in a range of contexts, will give children the opportunity to thrive.

Through **conversation, storytelling and role play**, where children share their ideas with support and modelling from their teacher, and sensitive questioning that invites them to elaborate, children become comfortable using a rich range of vocabulary and language structures.

Development Matters

To help parents, carers and children, Kindred Squared along with nursery groups, organisations and charities concerned with education, have come together to define, for the first time, what they believe being ready to start Reception actually means. All the information and recommendations for parents, carers and families are available on the new [Starting Reception website](#).

The 'Starting Reception' definition of school readiness is an agreed list of suggested skills and activities which parents should be practising with their children in preparation for starting school in Reception year.

School readiness

The 'Starting Reception' definition, written by a coalition of leading education and early years organisations, sets out the personal, social, emotional and physical skills that most children will develop by the time they start school.

It identifies a set of skills to practice before Reception, which are grouped into 4 categories: **(PURPLE - clear links to Little Link)**

<p>Growing independence</p> <p>Taking care of themselves</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Taking on/looking after their coat and shoes ○ Using the toilet and washing their hands ○ Getting dressed with little help, e.g. after using the toilet or doing PE ○ Using cutlery (e.g. fork and spoon, chopsticks) and drinking from an open cup ○ Spending time away from you, knowing they can be looked after by caring adults <p>Play creativity and curiosity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Taking part in imaginative play (e.g. role play) ○ Drawing, painting, colouring and sticking ○ Sharing story books with caregivers, looking at pictures and talking about the characters ○ Exploring the world around them (e.g. looking closely at the natural world or playing safely with objects at home) 	<p>Building relationships and communicating</p> <p>Being with others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Practising sharing and taking turns with toys ○ Talking to them about how they are feeling and why ○ Looking at story books together and speaking about what characters are feeling is a good way to do this ○ Beginning to recognise what others are feeling, e.g. understanding if a friend is sad ○ Encouraging them to set boundaries for themselves and others (e.g. knowing how to say 'no') <p>Communication and language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Singing along with songs and nursery rhymes ○ Talking happily to others about activities, experiences and the world around them ○ Showing they need help by speaking clearly (in basic English or sign language) ○ Recognising the pattern of their name (so they can find it on their coat peg or jacket) <p>Listening and engaging</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Paying attention for short periods of time ○ Listening to and following simple instructions ○ Carrying on with a task even when it's difficult and bouncing back if things go wrong
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School readiness

<p>Physical development</p> <p>Getting moving for at least three hours a day</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Walking up and down steps (one foot at a time, using the wall for support) ○ Climbing, running, jumping and playing ○ Catching a large ball (most of the time) ○ Doing simple puzzles and craft activities, strengthening their grip with cutting and sticking 	<p>Healthy routines</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Going to bed around the same time each night, waking up in time to get ready for school ○ Limiting screen time to the recommended daily amounts (see advice) ○ Eating a healthy diet and trying new foods ○ Brushing their teeth with fluoride toothpaste twice a day (you'll need to supervise this until they are at least 7)
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