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SECONDARY



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THE SPEECH & LANGUAGE MAGAZINE FOR SCHOOLS

SPEECH, LANGUAGE & COMMUNICATION AT THE HEART OF YOUR INCLUSION STRATEGY

—pages 10-14

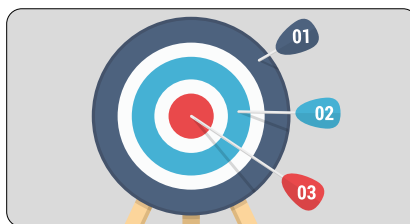


**INCLUSION
STRATEGY
SPECIAL**

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**MONOTROPISM:
WHY SOME STUDENTS
LISTEN DIFFERENTLY**



**TARGETED RESOURCES TO
SUPPORT YOUR INCLUSION
STRATEGY**



**COMMUNICATION
SUPPORTIVE SECONDARY
CLASSROOMS**

Welcome to the latest issue of *The Link Secondary*.

It never ceases to astonish me how speech, language and communication shape nearly every aspect of school life. Whether we're talking about learning, wellbeing, literacy or inclusion, communication is often the thread that connects them all.

That's certainly true of this issue. In our **Inclusion Strategy Special (pages 10-14)**, we explore how placing speech, language and communication at the heart of school improvement can drive meaningful inclusion. Rather than being another initiative to add to the list, communication is the foundation that helps students access learning, participate confidently and feel they belong.

The theme continues throughout the magazine. On **pages 4-5**, **Dr Pooky Knightsmith** explores monotropism and why some students listen differently, encouraging us to rethink traditional ideas about attention and engagement. On **pages 6-7**, **Louise Shelby** examines the powerful link between spelling and meaning, showing how language knowledge supports literacy development. Then, on **pages 8-9**, specialist speech and language therapist, **Milly Clarke** answers a question many educators ask: *What does a speech and language therapist do to help a student with DLD grow?* Her article offers valuable insight into helping young people with developmental language disorder thrive.

You'll also find specialist speech and language therapist, **Juliet Leonard's** article on **communication-supportive**

secondary classrooms (pages 16-17). While there may be no single magic formula, there are practical principles that can help create environments where students feel understood, confident and ready to learn.

I hope this issue leaves you with fresh ideas, useful strategies and renewed confidence in the difference communication-friendly practice can make. Thank you for being part of **The Link Community**, and for everything you do to support young people every day.

Have a good term!
Best wishes, Claire Chambers.



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

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THE LINK COMMUNITY



glossary

Fatigue Mood swings Memory difficulties trauma **ABI** MASKING

Brain

HIDDEN DISABILITY



Excerpt from **The Ultimate Guide to SLCN**
by **Sophie Mustoe-Playfair** and **Louise Burton**, specialist speech and language therapists at Speech & Language Link

ACQUIRED BRAIN INJURY

The umbrella term 'acquired brain injury' (ABI) describes an injury to the brain which happens sometime after birth and following a period of normal development. There are many causes of ABI, including traumatic brain injury (TBI) which is commonly the result of a fall or road traffic accident; illnesses and infections or medical procedures. The brain can be damaged by deprivation of oxygen as well as by direct trauma. The site of the injury can be small or widespread, and any part of the brain can be affected.

ABI can lead to changes in the way a person thinks, feels, and interacts with their environment. Typically, ABI will result in a diverse set of difficulties, and these difficulties can mask one another, so it can be difficult to identify the root cause of specific behaviours. Any difficulties associated with ABI may not be immediately obvious, as most children with ABI have no physical signs of their disability.

Prevalence

Every year an estimated 1.4 million people attend hospital in England and Wales with a head injury, of which 33-50% are children less than 15 years old. Exact figures are unknown, but it is estimated that 24-31.6% of young people have suffered a TBI. A larger number of children and young people would be expected to be living with ABI.

The changes and difficulties surrounding ABI are hard to spot, therefore, it is sometimes called 'the hidden disability'. The type of injury a child has sustained will be unique to them and the impact that the injury has will also be unique.

Difficulties specific to speech and language or education:

- Slow processing speed
- Difficulties maintaining concentration and high distractibility by visual and auditory information
- Memory difficulties

- Difficulties with articulation of speech sounds might occur due to motor function impairments
- Impaired conversation skills
- Impaired social awareness and social communication skills
- Behavioural changes, which can sometimes include increased aggression
- Emotional changes, including intense and rapid 'mood swings', increased anxiety and depression
- Personality changes are common, which can put a significant strain on friendships and family relationships
- Difficulties understanding and using language
- Specific difficulties with word-finding
- Difficulties with reasoning skills
- Difficulties with planning and organisation
- Fatigue, impaired mobility and limb weaknesses

Some difficulties arising from ABI will respond to direct interventions, but other difficulties may be permanent. At least 10% of mild brain injuries will have a long-term impact.

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:



MONOTROPISM:

why some students listen differently



By **Dr Pooky Knightsmith**, autistic speaker,
author and advisor

A student who can talk about Formula One for twenty minutes without pausing for breath can go completely blank when you ask what they did at the weekend, and might not respond when you say their name, only to answer a question you asked four minutes ago.

That can look like inconsistency, or like a student who listens when it suits them. It's neither. It's a different attention architecture, and once you understand it, a good deal of what happens in your classroom starts to make sense.

The idea is called monotropism and it was developed by autistic researchers Dinah Murray, Wenn Lawson and Mike Lesser, who understood attention as finite and always spread somehow. Most brains are polytropic, spreading attention thinly across several channels at once, so you can half-listen to a colleague while keeping an eye on the clock. Monotropic brains channel almost everything into one attention tunnel at a time. Fewer channels, but each one runs remarkably deep.

So, the difference isn't how much attention a student has; it's how it's distributed. Your voice isn't being ignored. It's competing for something that's already fully committed elsewhere.

What this means for communication

This matters for anyone working with speech, language and communication needs, because monotropism accounts for a lot of what can look like receptive language difficulty or plain unwillingness. In secondary it gets read as attitude more often than anything else.

Processing takes longer because the student must come out of one attention tunnel before they can enter another, so the words may well have gone in even when nothing comes back. That silence is expensive in a secondary

classroom, because it happens in front of thirty peers and gets taken as not knowing, or not caring, when it is neither.

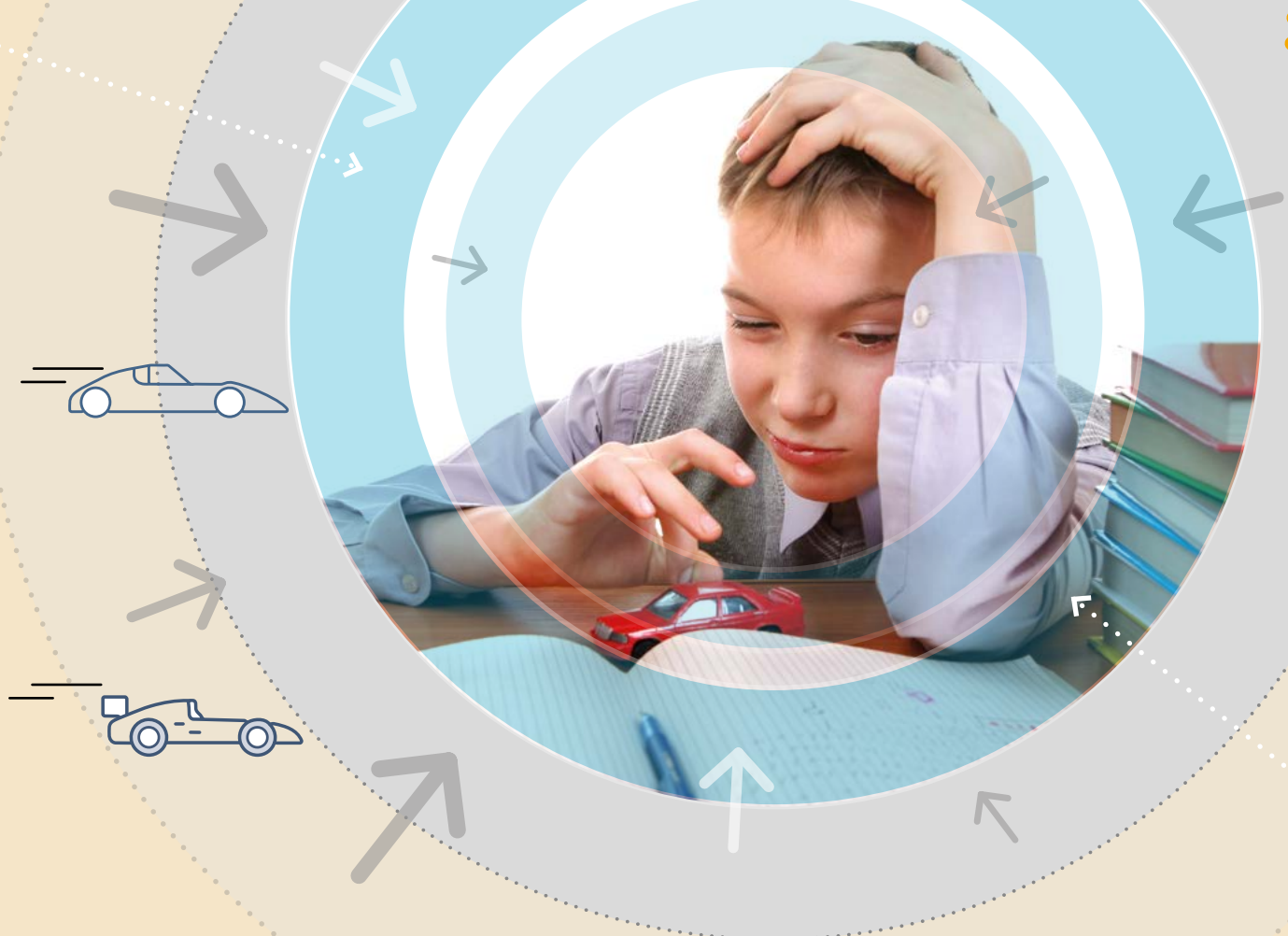
Long strings of instructions rarely survive the trip, and they tend to arrive at the busiest moment of the lesson. "Finish that paragraph, stick the sheet in, copy the homework down and start packing away" are four demands arriving at a student who is still mid sentence, and what tends to come back is the last item, or none of them.

Eye contact can make listening harder rather than easier. Wenn Lawson has written about needing to look away from people in order to hear them, because attending to a face gets in the way of attending to the words. That is worth holding against your behaviour policy, because a student looking at the floor while you talk may be listening as hard as they can and being sanctioned for it. It can help to say so out loud: "You don't have to look at me while you listen, I'll know you're listening."

5

THINGS TO TRY TOMORROW

- ✓ Warn before you change task, not just before the bell
- ✓ Give one instruction, wait, then give the next
- ✓ Put multi-step instructions on the board as well as saying them
- ✓ Tell a student a question is coming before you ask it
- ✓ Check your behaviour policy isn't sanctioning a student for listening



PRACTICAL THINGS THAT HELP

None of this needs new resources or a change to your timetable, it's mostly about slowing down where we usually speed up. Here are some things you could try:

Warn the tunnel before you close it

A secondary day asks for five or six tunnel exits before lunch and each costs something. A countdown before you change task, rather than only before the bell, lets a student come out on their own terms. Thirty seconds of warning often saves ten minutes of resistance.

Think about how the words arrive

One instruction at a time works far better than four, so say it, wait and say the next one, and put the sequence on the board as well. Resist the urge to rephrase, as that starts the whole process again from scratch.

Give questions a head start

If you want a student to answer in front of the class, tell them the question is coming and say you'll come back to them in a minute. The

knowledge is usually there and what's missing is the time to reach it, and a student who is never given that time learns quickly that the safest answer is "I don't know".

Use the tunnel rather than fighting it

If a student's attention lives with Warhammer, then Warhammer is your way in, and Rebecca Wood's research makes a strong case that intense interests support inclusion and learning rather than competing with them. Source analysis, extended writing and revision all work perfectly well with an interest running through them.

None of this asks you to do more, it asks you to do slightly less at a few moments in the day. And the student who couldn't tell you what they did at the weekend is the same student who, given room to stay in their tunnel a little longer, will know more about Formula One than you or I ever will. That depth is worth building around rather than interrupting.

AUTHOR PROFILE

Dr Pooky Knightsmith is an autistic psychologist, speaker and author specialising in mental health and neurodivergence in children and young people. She trains school staff across the UK and beyond and is the mother of two autistic daughters. She writes and speaks about what genuinely helps, in language busy staff can use tomorrow.



To find more from Pooky go to pookyknightsmith.com

SPELLING AND MEANING:

never a whisper apart?



By **Louise Selby**, trainer, consultant, author and assessor in dyslexia, specific learning difficulties and literacy

Spelling and meaning are closer relatives than you may realise. The purpose of spelling is to represent meaning, while meaning often explains spelling. The two should never be more than a whisper apart. So why is spelling too often taught as if meaning has nothing to do with it?

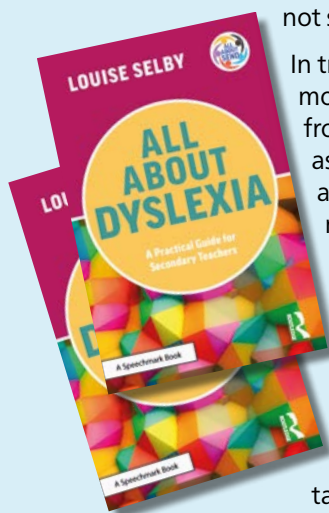
The National Curriculum assumes there is no more new spelling content to teach beyond primary school. However, we all know better! And yet few secondary practitioners have been trained in how to teach it. Many students are still guessing how to spell words, with 'sounding out' the only tool some of them seem to have. Spelling may be decipherable but phonetic, for example **reacshon** (**reaction**). Maybe it's time to give up on explicit teaching; after all, don't we have spell check? Spell check may fix yesterday's essay, but it doesn't help students understand today's unfamiliar word or tomorrow's academic vocabulary. That's because English spelling is not simply a code for sounds.

In truth, our written language is morphophonemic, meaning that it is built from morphemes (units of meaning, such as prefixes, suffixes and roots) as well as phonemes (units of sound). If we do not teach learners to understand the structure of the words we expect them to use, we fail to show them how meaning itself can support accurate spelling.

Learners who are trained to recognise these meaningful links don't just improve their spelling: their vocabulary expands as well. Let's take the word **respiration**, which our students may spell as **resperation**, **resporation**, or even **respuration**. However, if they know that the root is **spire**, meaning breathe, they start to not only understand it, but spell it correctly as well. They can then make links between this word and other academic words, for example **spirit**, **conspiracy**. Whether students are grappling with **photosynthesis**, **geothermal**, **constitutional**, or **electromagnetic**, understanding the meaningful building blocks makes those spellings far less arbitrary.

Those elusive homophones can be also explained by their morphemes: **disgust** comes from the root **gust** meaning taste, while **discussed** come from the root **cuss** meaning to shake; this means are shaking something apart when we discuss it!

We know from research that morphological exploration develops transferable literacy skills as well as spelling knowledge. It strengthens vocabulary, reading comprehension and writing. It gives learners tools to make sense of language rather than simply remember it. When we help learners understand how words work, spelling becomes less about memory and more about meaning. And surely that was the purpose of spelling all along.



LS LOUISE SELBY
DYSLEXIA SPECIALIST

Louise Selby is a trainer, consultant, author and assessor in dyslexia, specific learning difficulties and literacy. She is the creator of Morph Mastery, a Morphological Intervention for Reading, Spelling and Vocabulary, published in 2021 by Speechmark (Routledge). Her "All About Dyslexia" books (one for primary teachers and the other for secondary teachers) were published in December 2024. Louise offers bespoke and on-demand training in spelling, writing, reading, dyslexia, SEND and Morph Mastery and can be contacted via her website www.louiseselbydyslexia.com or email Louise directly at louise@louiseselbydyslexia.com



10 TOP TIPS



So how does this work in the classroom?

- 1 Teach vocabulary explicitly and look beyond definitions into the morphological structure of the words to unlock meaning.
- 2 Delve beneath the surface. Rather than asking, "How do you spell this word?" ask, "Can you think of another word with the same prefix/root/suffix?"
- 3 Admit when you don't know something. You do not need to be a linguist! You just need to know where to find out. I recommend online dictionaries, such as www.dictionary.com and www.etymonline.com.
- 4 Spend time discussing structure of words as you discuss their meanings. Students will not only develop subject knowledge and spelling, but they will begin to make links across the subjects.
- 5 Encourage curiosity about words. Spend a minute noticing a useful prefix or suffix that crops up in a class text.
- 6 Build words together. **Import** can be built into **portable**, **export**, **transport** (port meaning to bear), while traction can be built into **tractor**, **contract**, **subtract** (tract meaning pull).
- 7 Explore words together, ask questions like:
 - a. Can you change the root/prefix/suffix for another?
 - b. What is the meaning or function of the prefix or suffix?
- 8 Be spies for morphemes in texts your learners are reading and writing themselves. Encourage them to find familiar prefixes, roots and suffixes and make links between words.
- 9 Encourage talk about spelling and meaning together. Ask, why do you think this word is spelled this way? What can we learn from its root, prefix and suffix?
- 10 Create word trees for curricular vocabulary: write the root at the base of the tree, and words it can make on the branches.

ASK A Therapist



By **Milly Clarke**, specialist
speech and language therapist

Join The Link Community
to access resources, blogs
and videos to help you
raise awareness of DLD in
your setting.



Q: What does a
speech and
language therapist
do to help a student
with DLD grow?

A:

When I agreed to write an 'Ask a therapist' piece about developmental language disorder (DLD), it struck me as particularly fitting that the theme for DLD day this year (16th October 2026) is #TogetherforDLD and that really, this isn't a topic for just 'the therapist' at all, but something we all need to get involved in and talk about.

DLD is a hidden, lifelong condition affecting around 2 students in every class of 30; that's more prevalent than many other forms of neurodivergence that are much more widely known about. Children and young people with DLD have significant difficulties understanding and using spoken language and this not only impacts on literacy and learning but often has wider implications for friendships, emotional regulation, mental health and social integration.

Though lifelong, we know that children and young people with DLD can and do make progress – in fact, they can thrive, but only when the right support is in place and everyone works together. That's when the magic happens and these amazing individuals have lightbulb moments and start to access the world in ways that they didn't think was possible. I'll never forget a Year 8 student who, through regular explicit vocabulary teaching, began surprising us by using sophisticated vocabulary in spontaneous conversation.

I have been lucky enough to experience this 'magic' more than once during my career. Each time, it has been the 'working together' that has led to great outcomes.

The question is, what role does each of us play in this highly important collaboration?

- The unrelenting support of a parent, who creates a safe space and time to talk
- The teaching assistant who is always there with humour and a smile, to repeat key information
- The maths teacher who has highlighted key words and made it visual
- The speech and language therapist (SaLT) who identifies, prioritises and facilitates support

For a flower to grow and bloom, it requires specific ingredients and the environment needs to be just right. Water, nutrients and sunlight are essential for growth, but each flower is different and requires its own unique approach to really thrive.

Just as with flowers, each student with DLD needs some essential ingredients and that personal touch to grow and flourish and we all have a part to play. If each of us takes responsibility for just one ingredient in their journey of growth, it could make all the difference.

What does DLD look like?

- Persistent difficulties understanding spoken language and following instructions
- Difficulties organising thoughts and ideas into spoken language that is easy to follow
- Challenges forming spoken sentences using complex grammar
- Difficulties learning, remembering and retrieving vocabulary, e.g., word finding difficulties
- Hidden challenges can lead to difficulties regulating behaviour and emotions

Remember these essential, high impact strategies, when helping your pupils with DLD to 'GROW':

Give extra thinking time

Allowing 10-12 seconds thinking time to answer a question improves pupil participation and boosts confidence and independence.

Repeat and revisit key information

Revisiting key vocabulary and facts aids memory and recall.

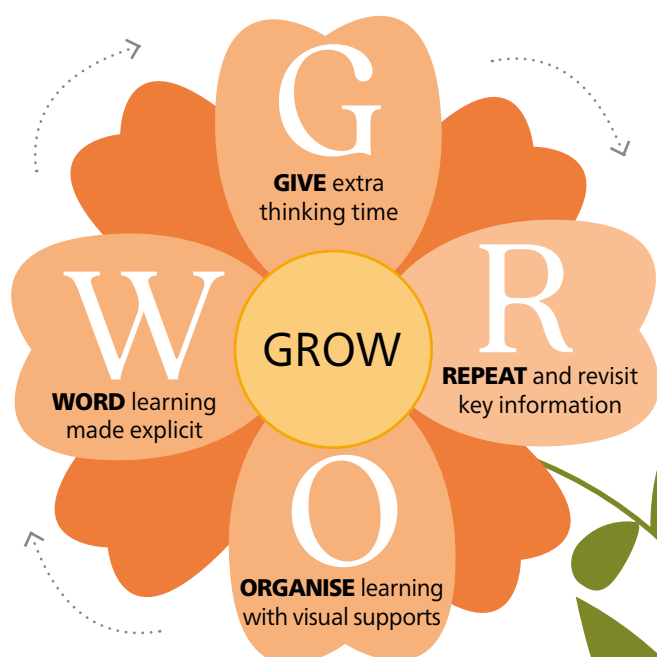
Organise learning with visual supports

Visuals support understanding. Spoken language is transient, whereas visual information remains available for repeated reference.

Word learning made explicit

Vocabulary knowledge is fundamental for learning and life. Explicit teaching of word meaning and sound structure supports vocabulary learning and retention.

When thinking about '#Together for DLD' this October, ask not just 'a therapist' but yourself, "What can I do to help a student with DLD to grow?"



Myth Busting

'Pupils with DLD will grow out of it.'

Challenges can persist into adulthood, but with support, pupils can make progress, learn strategies and develop the ability to self-advocate.



SPEECH, LANGUAGE & COMMUNICATION

at the heart of your inclusion strategy



INCLUSION
STRATEGY
SPECIAL



The Department for Education (DfE) requires all schools in England to publish an Inclusion Strategy by 31 December 2026. The strategy should combine local evidence, national expectations and practical planning to improve inclusion for all pupils. The DfE's framework includes seven principles of inclusion and a five-step approach to strategy development. Schools are expected to identify barriers to learning and participation, select and fund appropriate activities and define the outcomes they intend to achieve.

Up to
50%



of children in the most disadvantaged areas may start school with some type of speech, language and communication need (SLCN).

Approx
80%



In addition, approximately 80% of those with a social, emotional or mental health issue have some type of underlying SLCN.

**STEP
1**

Understanding your cohort

Whilst the DfE template starts with a **Statement of Intent**, before you can create this you need to understand your cohort.

Where there is evidence within your needs analysis of social exclusion, behaviour challenges, reduced attendance, literacy difficulties and ultimately poorer educational outcomes, it is important to remember that all of these are strongly linked to communication difficulties. These issues cannot be fully addressed in isolation from speech, language and communication (SLC).

**STEP
2**

Identifying barriers to learning and participation

National research highlights that SLCN is one of the most common barriers to learning and literacy, behaviour, attendance and social participation. At a classroom level, problems may manifest as difficulties following instructions, accessing vocabulary-heavy curriculum content, participating in group work or managing social interactions.

Given the prevalence of SLCN, communication difficulties should be regarded as a predictable need within many school populations and therefore as one of the commonly occurring and predictable barriers referenced by the DfE.

Noting predictable need rather than more straightforward identified need will help your school to be on the lookout for students who are struggling. Whilst schools can use SEND profiles and transition information to note already identified needs, SLC needs are not always observable as students find ways to manage their difficulties (often called 'masking'). The best way to identify students who may struggle is to screen language levels universally, particularly on school entry and at significant transition points, such as into junior and secondary school.

STEP 3**Selecting activities and approaches**

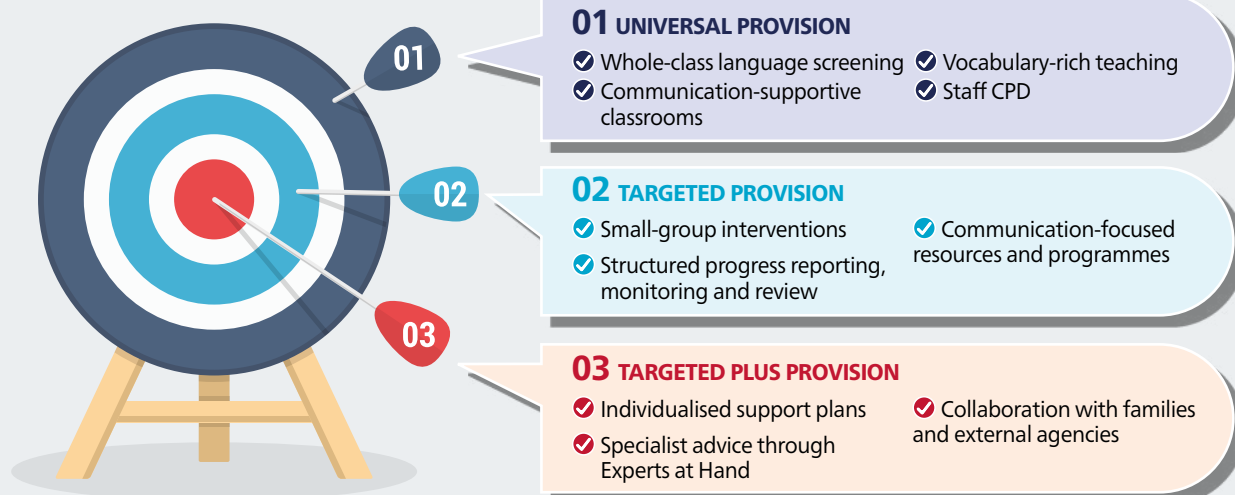
It is important to select tools which offer or facilitate appropriate support at each tier of intervention. Whole class communication strategies are part of the universal support layer for SLCN but will also form an integral part of universal SEND support for all areas in which SLC is a key component.

Back to Statement of Intent

Having completed the previous steps, consider returning to your Statement of Intent which now may be easier to write.

Funding sources and budgeted costs

Consider SLC support across universal, targeted, and targeted plus levels, using integrated tools and staff training that support movement between levels in line with SEND reform aims. Costs can be funded through Inclusive Mainstream Funding, the notional SEN budget, core CPD funding and Pupil Premium.

**STEP 4****Implementing, monitoring and reviewing**

A common challenge for schools is ensuring that good intentions become consistent practice. When implementing SLC support, start by identifying a small number of priority actions and ensure that staff understand not only what to do, but why it matters, appropriate CPD can be essential here.

Communication-supportive classrooms, explicit vocabulary instruction, structured opportunities for speaking and listening, and adaptations to teacher language should be visible

throughout the school. Leaders should monitor implementation through learning walks, pupil voice activities and discussion with staff, focusing on how communication is being supported.

Alongside implementation, it is important to review the effectiveness of both universal and targeted support. Schools should consider how information gathered is shared with teachers, parents and other professionals to support joined-up decision making.

STEP 5**Evaluating the impact and refine**

The final step is to evaluate whether the activities identified within the Inclusion Strategy are reducing barriers to learning and participation. Although language scores and intervention outcomes are important, schools should also consider wider indicators of inclusion.

For example, has there been an improvement in attendance, engagement and participation? Are pupils more confident in expressing themselves and contributing in lessons? Have staff developed greater confidence in recognising and supporting communication needs? Are fewer

pupils requiring increasingly intensive levels of support because needs are being identified and addressed earlier?

Speech, language and communication is not a stand-alone priority. It is a foundation that underpins learning, relationships, wellbeing and inclusion. Making speech, language and communication a core element of your Inclusion Strategy is therefore not simply a SEND initiative. It is a practical and evidence-informed way of addressing some of the most significant barriers to learning and participation.



FROM STRATEGY TO IMPACT:

using Secondary Language Link tools to drive inclusion



Creating an Inclusion Strategy is an important first step but making inclusion a reality happens through everyday practice. Reflecting the DfE's focus on early identification, inclusive teaching and removing barriers to learning, Speech & Language Link helps schools put their plans into action. By combining assessment, classroom support, interventions, staff training and reporting, it provides a practical framework for strengthening speech, language and communication support and helping every pupil participate, learn and thrive.

Identifying and understanding barriers

Many pupils with speech and language difficulties go unnoticed. They may seem quiet, disengaged or lacking confidence, when the real challenge is an underlying communication need. **The Speech & Language Link whole-class screening tools help schools uncover those hidden needs early.**

Developed in collaboration with the University of Cambridge Psychometrics Centre, the assessments identify receptive language difficulties and highlight potential speech sound concerns, giving schools robust evidence on which to act.

Available for children and young people aged 3-15 years, the assessments are quick to administer and provide secure online reporting at pupil, class, school, trust and local authority level.

SPEECH & LANGUAGE LINK TOOLKITS



Language assessment, intervention and reporting

Secondary Language Link (11-14 years)

Professional development

SLCN training for secondary settings

Strengthening the universal offer



A strong universal offer reduces barriers before pupils require additional support. Speech & Language Link supports this with teacher-friendly guidance that translates research into simple, effective classroom strategies. Bite-sized instructional coaching and resources from our new '*Classroom Essentials*' tools help staff put these ideas into practice with confidence.

Our professional development offer for teachers, teaching assistants and SENCos strengthens understanding of speech, language and communication and helps staff apply evidence-informed approaches consistently across the school.



The targeted level

Therapist-designed interventions provide structured small-group support based on needs identified through screening and

assessment. Activities focus on developing functional communication skills that help pupils participate more effectively in lessons, social interactions and wider school life.

'Experts on hand'

All toolkits include access to our Help Desk and therapy team. Schools can obtain support with technical, administrative, implementation or therapy-related questions through a single point of contact. Our therapists act as your **'experts on hand'**, helping schools interpret results, plan next steps and make effective use of targeted support.

Targeted plus



Some pupils require support beyond universal and targeted provision. For these learners, screening data, intervention records and progress reports provide a shared evidence base for discussions with

'Experts at Hand' teams: speech and language therapists, educational psychologists and specialist teachers.

Supporting collaboration with specialists has long been a feature of Speech & Language Link. By bringing everyone together around shared information, schools can make more informed decisions and ensure specialist expertise informs support within mainstream settings.

This supports the SEND reforms' emphasis on multi-agency collaboration and helping specialist expertise inform practice within mainstream settings.

Comparing need, monitoring and reviewing

Effective Inclusion Strategies require leaders to understand both need and impact. Speech & Language Link reporting tools allow schools, MATs and local authorities to analyse trends, compare outcomes and identify common communication needs across groups and settings.

This information can help leaders prioritise resources, monitor implementation and demonstrate how funded activities are

addressing identified barriers to learning and participation, linking directly to Inclusion Strategy requirements.

A pathway to support

Together, the Speech & Language Link tools create a coherent pathway from identification to intervention and review. Whole-class screening supports early identification, communication audits highlight classroom barriers, staff training strengthens universal provision and structured interventions address identified needs. Ongoing support from the Help Desk and therapy team helps schools implement provision with confidence, while digital tracking and reporting tools support monitoring at pupil, school and governance levels.

Partnerships

Speech & Language Link can also help strengthen partnerships with families and wider services. The Parent Portal provides accessible guidance and home-practice activities, helping parents reinforce communication skills beyond the classroom. Data sharing features can also support collaborative conversations with Experts at Hand teams and other professionals involved in a child's support.

Implementing SLCN support within your Inclusion Strategy

Speech, language and communication underpin learning, participation, wellbeing and inclusion. By combining early identification, evidence-informed intervention, workforce development and robust monitoring, Speech & Language Link provides schools with a practical framework for implementing and evidencing the SLCN elements of their Inclusion Strategy.

Whether your focus is identifying predictable need, strengthening your universal offer, delivering targeted support or demonstrating impact, Speech & Language Link can support every stage of the inclusion journey.



To learn more, access our free SLCN inclusion readiness checklist, sign up for a webinar, or explore support for MAT, go to: speechandlanguage.link/inclusion or have a look at the next page containing links and QR codes for our collection of useful resources.



69.2%

OF PARTICIPANTS SAID THAT USING SECONDARY LANGUAGE LINK HAD MADE A DIFFERENCE TO STUDENT ATTAINMENT



TARGETED RESOURCES



**INCLUSION
STRATEGY
SPECIAL**

1

SLCN Inclusion Readiness Checklist

A useful checklist to reflect on your SLCN inclusion plans, barriers to learning, pupil engagement, predictable needs, CPD, classroom support and intended outcomes.

Get checklist...



2

SLCN and Inclusion Webinar

Kate Freeman discusses the importance and foundational role of SLCN in your Inclusion Strategy – Wednesday 30th September at 4:00pm.

Register here...



3

Implementing Inclusion across your MAT

Access MAT wide SLCN support and find out how the Speech & Language Link team can help you with implementation of your Inclusion Strategy.

Find out more...



4

Learn more about Secondary Language Link

A comprehensive set of assessment, intervention and reporting resources designed to help identify and support young people with language, and communication needs

Explore Secondary Language Link...



5

Book a free, one month trial of Secondary Language Link

Run some language assessments, review the interventions and resources, check out the reports. No obligation, no payment details needed, no 'hard sell', just a dedicated team waiting to support you.

Take free trial...



6

DfE Inclusion Strategy Template

The DfE have published an Inclusion Strategy Template, you can find it here along with other useful information about the Inclusive Mainstream Fund.

Access the template...



One TA to another



By **Claire Chambers**, The Link editor

SUPPORTING A STUDENT WITH AN ACQUIRED BRAIN INJURY

If you have read our SLCN Glossary feature on page 3, you will have seen how an acquired brain injury (ABI) can affect communication, learning and everyday life. It is a subject close to my heart. In secondary school, I supported three students whose ABI resulted from: a fall from a horse, a brain operation and an illness. Last year, my husband also had a traumatic brain injury. He has made good progress, but recovery is not a straight line. Some things will not be the same again, and ongoing adjustments are needed to support his quality of life.

One challenge with ABI is that a student may look and sound much as they did before. Their long-term memory may still be strong. They may remember jokes, respond appropriately and seem to be coping. Beneath that familiar surface, however, their brain may now be working very differently.

Depending on the injury, cognitive functioning can be seriously affected. The student may be managing poor short-term memory, slower processing, word-finding difficulties, reduced attention, impulsivity, disinhibition or difficulties with planning. Neuro fatigue can have a huge impact too. Energy levels may drop quickly depending on the task, environment or emotional demand. One week a student might run around the track; the next, they may not have the energy to put their trainers on. Neuro fatigue is the brain saying, "I am shutting down. My batteries are empty". At that point, even simple tasks can feel overwhelming and may lead to distress, anger or frustration.

So, how can we help students get the most out of school without draining those emotional, social and cognitive batteries?

- ✓ Talk to caregivers and professionals so you understand the student's difficulties, triggers and support strategies
- ✓ Remember that many effects of ABI are hidden. Do not underestimate the effort involved in familiar tasks
- ✓ Build in regular breaks away from noise, screens and other distractions
- ✓ Share key information across the school so everyone knows what helps and what to avoid
- ✓ Be clear about seizure risk and what to do if one occurs
- ✓ Use core communication strategies: explain clearly, give processing time, check understanding and revisit key points
- ✓ Do not push when the shutters are coming down. Be gentle, check for pain and reduce demands

Crucially, remember that a student may become skilled at masking or putting on a front. They may convince everyone that things are as they were before the ABI, as they don't want to be seen as different. It can take enormous effort, just to get through the day.

A brain injury is usually a hidden disability, and some effects may be lifelong. As TAs, our compassion, curiosity and willingness to adapt can make school feel safer, kinder and more manageable.

Find out more about supporting speech, language and communication here:



COMMUNICATION SUPPORTIVE SECONDARY CLASSROOMS

— the magic formula



By **Juliet Leonard**, specialist speech and language therapist, Speech & Language Link

Doesn't it feel great when you walk into a classroom where everything feels set up for students to have fun, learn and succeed with communication? A great classroom has a certain vibe about it, that makes you feel student can feel safe and supported. It's a combination of dedicated staff and skilled use of resources.

But how can a communication supportive classroom cater for different ages, stages, strengths and needs? Mainstream secondary classrooms cater for a diverse range of students: so, is there a magic formula?

A communication supportive classroom isn't a fixed recipe. It's a set of principles: predictability, clarity, accessibility, and plenty of opportunities for interaction that can be supported in many different ways according to student needs.

At its core, a communication supportive classroom includes:

- Clear visual supports
- Predictable routines
- Accessible language
 - Reduced cognitive and sensory load
 - Opportunities for purposeful talk
 - Adults who model communication thoughtfully

Whilst these elements form the backbone, no two classrooms will look identical because no two groups of learners share the same communication profiles. One class may need highly

structured visual timetables; another may thrive with flexible, discussion rich zones; designated places and times where talk is part of learning. One group may need reduced visual and verbal load; another may need explicit vocabulary teaching embedded everywhere.

Most classes have students with contrasting communication and sensory needs. For example, one individual may need quiet, low stimulus spaces to process language whilst another may need movement and sensory input to support regulation and communication. And, of course, in a secondary school, classes of students typically move around, meaning that classrooms need to be supportive while also being adaptable to the demands of the next class.

Zoning a space is a great way to achieve this support and flexibility; it allows a single classroom to support multiple communication profiles simultaneously. It creates smaller spaces within the larger classroom, each with a different communicative and sensory purpose.

Examples might be:

- 💡 **Quiet zones** for listening, reading, or processing language
- 💡 **Interactive zones** for group talk, role play and collaborative tasks
- 💡 **Sensory friendly zones** with reduced visual clutter and soft lighting
- 💡 **Movement or regulation zones** for students who need proprioceptive or vestibular input
- 💡 **Language boosting zones** with vocabulary displays, sentence stems and prompts





Zoning doesn't just organise space; it organises expectations, helping students understand what kind of communication is expected in each area.

Communication and sensory regulation are deeply intertwined. A pupil who is dysregulated, overwhelmed by noise, light, movement, or unpredictability, cannot access language effectively. This is where an occupational therapist's expertise becomes invaluable.

When teachers, speech and language therapists and occupational therapists collaborate, the classroom becomes not just communication supportive, but communication enabling.

Zoning requires thoughtful organisation of the classroom, where some parts are left quiet and clutter free, whilst others have the wall displays and apparatus that some students find so useful.

Every student should feel able to understand, express themselves and connect. How you achieve that will always be shaped by the unique combination of learners in your class.

A communication supportive classroom is therefore responsive, not prescriptive, and it evolves as the learners evolve.

SECONDARY
LanguageLink

Classroom Essentials new resources from Secondary Language Link

**New
2026**

OUR 6 CORE STRATEGIES



Give Time to Think

Allowing extra processing time helps pupils understand information and formulate responses more effectively



Show It Clearly

Using visual supports alongside spoken language strengthens understanding and engagement



Make a Safe Talk Space

Creating a classroom culture where questions and mistakes are welcomed encourages confidence and participation



Put Oracy at the Centre

Supporting pupils to learn through talk, learn about talk, and develop strong communication skills



Make It Make Sense

Presenting information clearly and breaking tasks into manageable steps improves accessibility for all learners



Build Independence

Teaching self-help strategies and encouraging autonomy prepares pupils for future success

Alongside the strategies, many classroom resources have been redesigned to align with current understanding of neurodiversity and inclusive practice. For example, updated materials recognise that behaviours traditionally associated with "good listening", such as sustained eye contact or sitting perfectly still, may not support learning for all students.

The result is a toolkit that is practical, flexible, and designed for real classrooms. Whether you're supporting students with identified speech, language and communication needs or simply aiming to improve communication across your whole class, **Classroom Essentials** provides a strong foundation for success.

Explore our communication supportive sample resources with a free trial.

Helping every pupil understand, communicate, participate, and thrive.



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welcome to

TheLink

The Link Community Quick Win

Taken from the blog: **Universal teaching approaches for secondary classrooms**

The five-minute vocabulary review

Start your lesson by revisiting three to five key words from previous learning. Ask students to match words to definitions, identify examples or use the terms in context before introducing new content.

A brief vocabulary review can strengthen understanding, improve recall and help students make connections between lessons, particularly when encountering technical language across the curriculum.

It's simple, doesn't require extra planning and supports all learners, including those with SLCN.

Read the full blog here:



Dates for your diary

Our events team, alongside some of our speech and language therapists, will be travelling across the country this term, sharing practical strategies and expertise with education professionals. Take a look at our events calendar below to see if we're heading your way. We'd love you to come along and say hello.

2ND OCTOBER

The National Education Show, Utilita Arena, Cardiff.
Stand: 15

2ND OCTOBER

Early Years SEND Roadshow, Watershed, Bristol.
Speaker session

8TH OCTOBER

Early Years Foundation Stage conference: Connected beginnings, Sandy Park, Exeter.

9-10TH OCTOBER

Tes SEND Show 2026, Business Design Centre, London.
Stand: E42

11TH NOVEMBER

The Education People Show, Detling, Kent
Stand: K19



From screening tool to school-wide success: our Secondary Language Link journey

Debbie Jones, SEND Practitioner: SLCN and Neurodiversity, Robertsbridge Community College, East Sussex

"I just wanted to share my story:

When I started in my position, Secondary Language Link was just used as a testing tool and nothing more as it was not seen as a need.

When I was asked to look at Secondary Language Link, I worked with my SENCo and began to use the Secondary Language Link Intervention toolkit.

It has made such an impact within the school that we now get internal referrals and work with an external SLCN therapist to support students. Secondary Language Link is an integral part of our interventions support umbrella. I have now been asked to support another secondary school with training to get them up and running.

One thing I find amazing is the Help Desk – nothing is too much trouble and they respond very quickly."



Take a free trial

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Community news

QUICK QUIZ

Test Your SLCN (speech, language and communication needs) Knowledge

- 1 Which of the following may indicate a student is experiencing language difficulties?
 - A) Regularly forgetting equipment
 - B) Struggling to follow multi-step instructions
 - C) Preferring practical subjects to academic ones
- 2 Approximately how many students in a class of 30 are likely to have long-term SLCN?
 - A) 1-2
 - B) 3-5
 - C) 8-10
- 3 What is the most effective way to support understanding when introducing a new topic?
 - A) Speak more slowly
 - B) Provide visual supports alongside explanations
 - C) Give students more written notes
- 4 Which classroom strategy is most likely to help students process information?
 - A) Asking students to answer immediately
 - B) Repeating the question more loudly
 - C) Giving thinking time before asking for responses
- 5 Why can subject-specific vocabulary be challenging for some students?
 - A) It often includes unfamiliar words and concepts that students do not encounter in everyday conversation
 - B) It contains longer words
 - C) It is only used in exams
- 6 What is a common challenge for secondary students with SLCN?
 - A) Keeping up with fast-paced classroom talk
 - B) Reading simple words
 - C) Holding a pencil correctly

How Did You Do?

0-2 correct: Don't worry, we all have to start somewhere.
Time to build your SLCN know-how!

3-4 correct: Great work - you've got a strong SLCN foundation.

5-6 correct: You're a speech and language legend!
Well done, clever clogs!

1. B 2. B 3. B 4. C 5. A 6. A
ANSWERS

Join The Link Community

Whatever your role in school, **The Link Community** offers free expert advice, practical resources and support to help children and young people with SLCN (speech, language and communication needs). Enjoy access to **The Link** magazine, exclusive event content, resources, blogs, podcasts and newsletters.

Membership is completely free, with no commitment. Join today.



Driving inclusion through language



Secondary Language Link

supports every stage of the graduated approach, helping schools turn inclusion plans into meaningful action.

It helps you to:

- ✓ Understand the speech, language and communication profile of your cohort
- ✓ Identify barriers to learning, participation and wellbeing that may otherwise be missed
- ✓ Inform effective **Universal**, **Targeted** and **Targeted Plus** provision
- ✓ Deliver evidence-based interventions for KS3 pupils
- ✓ Monitor progress and evidence impact
- ✓ Support whole-school SEND and inclusion priorities

FIND
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MORE



SCAN ME

An essential part of your Universal, Targeted and Targeted Plus provision