

TheLink

PRIMARY



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THE SPEECH & LANGUAGE MAGAZINE FOR SCHOOLS

YOUR INCLUSION STRATEGY:

from first steps to
lasting change

See pages 10-14

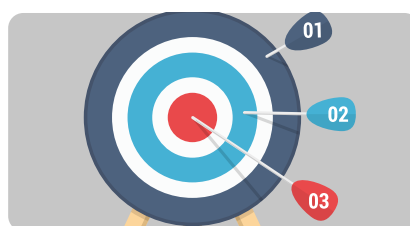


**INCLUSION
STRATEGY
SPECIAL**

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HELPING A CHILD WITH DLD GROW



TOOLS TO SUPPORT INCLUSION



SPELLING AND MEANING

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The Link Community

Hello and welcome to The Link
Primary,

What continues to strike me
as I bring each issue of this
magazine together is the breadth
of ways speech, language and
communication shape children's
experiences at school. From learning
and literacy to friendships, inclusion
and wellbeing, communication
underpins so much of what happens
in the classroom every day.

That theme runs throughout this
issue. In our **Inclusion Strategy
Special (pages 10-14)**, we explore
how placing speech, language and
communication at the heart of your
school's inclusion strategy can help
turn good intentions into meaningful
impact. When communication is
considered from the outset, it becomes
easier to create learning environments
where all pupils can participate,
achieve and feel they belong.

The conversation continues across
the magazine. On **pages 6-7, Dr
Pooky Knightsmith** introduces
the concept of monotropism and
explains why some children listen
differently, offering a fresh perspective
on attention and engagement. On
pages 16-17, Louise Shelby explores
the fascinating relationship between
spelling and meaning, demonstrating
how language knowledge supports
literacy development.

You'll also find practical classroom
inspiration on **pages 8-9**, where
specialist speech and language
therapist **Juliet Leonard**, explores the

principles behind
communication-
supportive
classrooms. There
may not be a magic
formula, but there
are plenty of simple, effective ways
to create environments where pupils
feel supported, confident and ready
to learn.

On **pages 4-5**, specialist speech and
language therapist **Milly Clarke**
tackles an important question: *What
does a speech and language therapist
do to help a pupil with DLD grow?*
Her article highlights that we all have
a part to play in helping a child with
DLD to grow and flourish.

Elsewhere, I share a few light-hearted
reflections in **One TA to another –
never not funny (page 3)**, and we're
delighted to feature a review of **Little
Link** by SENCo Abigail Hawkins on
page 15.

I hope this issue leaves you with
fresh ideas, practical strategies and
renewed confidence in the difference
communication supportive practice
can make. Thank you for being part
of **The Link Community**, and for
everything you do to help children
develop the communication skills they
need to learn, connect and thrive.

Have a great term!

Best wishes,

Claire Chambers,

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



Keep your free **Link magazine** coming!

Join **The Link Community (TLC)** today to continue receiving
your printed copy each term.

It's simple, delivered directly to your school and entirely free.



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speechandlanguage.link

Contact our Speech & Language Link Help Desk at:

E: helpdesk@speechlink.co.uk

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One TA to another

By **Claire Chambers**,
The Link editor

I don't know about you, but when I worked in a school, humour was one of my essential survival skills. Schools can be intense places and sometimes all you can do is laugh and carry on. So, to start the year with a smile, I'm opening the Chambers book of *'How NOT to be a TA'* and sharing a couple of anecdotes that will hopefully brighten your day!

Elvis has left the building

Take the intervention session where another TA and I were playing Articulate! with two Year 6 pupils. The answer was 'hound dog', and it was proving tricky to describe.

Me: (trying to be helpful):
"It's an Elvis song."

Pupil: Blank stare.

Me: So I launched into a surprisingly enthusiastic rendition and, in my best Elvis voice, sang, "You ain't nothing but a..." Then I stopped and waited confidently for the answer.

Pupil: After a moment's thought, confidently shouted: "Honda!"

We couldn't continue. The adults were crying with laughter while the pupils looked rather pleased with themselves.

To be fair, if you've never listened to Elvis, it's not a terrible guess. Naturally, we let them have it.

Turkey, tinsel and total chaos

My real claim to fame came during Christmas lunch.

Picture the scene: the whole school seated in the hall, festive music playing, Christmas crackers everywhere and tables laden with festive food.

Never not funny



I was attempting the simple task of sitting down on one of the benches with my plated Christmas dinner.

Unfortunately, as I lifted my leg over the bench, something went badly wrong.

I got stuck.

In trying to free myself, I started to fall back and somehow managed to pull the entire table over.

The table.

The bench.

Me.

And, most regrettably, the two pupils already sitting on it.

Everything went over together in what can only be described as a festive domino effect.

Fortunately, nobody was hurt, although my dignity took a significant knock, I had to run to the office and have a little sob while dabbing wet paper towels on my legs.

The pupils, however, thought it was the highlight of their Christmas. They'll always remember Mrs Chambers even it was only for the comedy.

And perhaps that's one of the best things about working in schools. For every carefully planned lesson and perfectly delivered intervention, there are moments nobody could possibly prepare for.

The moments that leave us red-faced, helpless with laughter and still telling the story years later. They may not appear on a provision map, but they're often the memories that remind us why we love the job.

I would love to feature your stories here – we all need a giggle, especially when things are really tough. Send them to me at:

claire.chambers@speechlink.co.uk



ASK A Therapist

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



By **Milly Clarke**, specialist speech and language therapist at Speech & Language Link

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 pupils 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 the time a class teacher used a visual system to teach the rules of tense to a year 6 pupil with DLD and the look of amazement on his face when it finally made sense.

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/caregiver, 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 class 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 child 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.

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, don't just 'ask a therapist' – also ask yourself, "What can I do to help a pupil with DLD to grow?"

Explore our new DLD support area in The Link Community: find expert videos, helpful blogs, and personal stories from people living with DLD.



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

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 how to self-advocate.



MONOTROPISM:

WHY SOME CHILDREN LISTEN DIFFERENTLY



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

A child who can talk about volcanoes for twenty minutes without pausing for breath can go completely blank when you ask what they had for breakfast, and might not respond when you call their name, only to answer a question you asked four minutes ago.

That can look like inconsistency, or like a child 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 child 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 (SLCN), because monotropism accounts for a lot of what can look like

receptive language difficulty or plain unwillingness.

Processing takes longer because the child 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. Getting to those words, working out what they mean and building a reply is a sequence of separate jobs, and each costs something.

"If a child's
attention lives with
dinosaurs then
dinosaurs are your
way in..."

Long strings of instructions rarely survive the trip. "Put your book away, get your coat, line up by the door and remember your lunchbox" are four demands arriving at a child who may still

be finishing the previous thing in their head 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, so asking a child to look at us while we speak may be asking them to choose between looking and listening. 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."



THINGS TO TRY TOMORROW

- 1 Warn before every transition, even the small ones
- 2 Give one instruction, wait, then give the next
- 3 Count to ten before you repeat yourself
- 4 Stop asking for eye contact during listening
- 5 Use the child's interest as the material, not the reward

PRACTICAL THINGS THAT HELP

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

✓ Give the tunnel some warning before you ask it to close

A countdown, a visual timer or a quiet "two more minutes and then we're coming to the carpet" lets a child come out on their own terms rather than being suddenly pulled out, and two minutes of warning often saves ten minutes of distress later.

✓ 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. Wait longer than feels comfortable, because ten seconds is an awkward silence for an adult and no time at all for a child climbing out of one attention tunnel and into another. Resist the urge to rephrase as this starts the whole process again from scratch. The child fiddling with something or staring hard at the carpet may be listening better than the child giving you beautiful eye contact.

✓ Use the tunnel rather than fighting it

If a child's attention lives with dinosaurs then dinosaurs are your way in, and Rebecca Wood's research makes a strong case that intense interests support inclusion and

learning rather than competing with them. Vocabulary, sequencing, turn taking and narrative all work perfectly well with a triceratops in them.

✓ Protect some deep focus where you can

Monotropic attention at full stretch is the same absorption we call flow, and a timetable chopped into short bursts rarely lets anyone reach it, so longer uninterrupted stretches on something a child cares about are worth defending.

None of this asks you to do more, it asks you to do slightly less at a few moments in the day. And the child who couldn't tell you what they had for breakfast is the same child who, given room to stay in their tunnel a little longer, will know more about volcanoes 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.

Where to find more from Pooky



On-demand training. A growing library of recorded sessions you can watch any time, at pookyknightsmith.com/on-demand-cpd



Instagram. Ideas shared through reels and images, and the occasional view from the back of a tandem, at @PookyH



Speaking and webinar enquiries. Email pooky@pookyknightsmith.com



COMMUNICATION SUPPORTIVE PRIMARY CLASSROOMS

— the magic formula



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

Doesn't it feel great when you walk into a classroom where everything feels set up for children 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 primary classrooms cater for a diverse range of pupils: 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 pupil 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 pupils with contrasting communication and sensory needs. For example, one child may need quiet, low-stimulus spaces to process language, whilst another may need movement and sensory input to support regulation and communication. So, how can a classroom be communication supportive to every learner?

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 children 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 child 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.



Classroom Essentials

new resources from
Speech Link and
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.



Scan
me





INCLUSION STRATEGY SPECIAL



SPEECH, LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

from strategy to impact

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.

STEP 1

Understanding your cohort

The DfE template starts with a **Statement of Intent** and should include how particular groups are supported. Consider groups in your school affected by social exclusion, behaviour challenges, reduced attendance, literacy difficulties and the groups who ultimately achieve

poorer educational outcomes. Remember that all of these are strongly linked to communication difficulties, so your **Statement of Intent** should consider how to combine these needs with addressing support for speech, language and communication (SLC).

More
than
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 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 children who are struggling. Whilst schools can use SEND profiles and transition information to note already identified needs, SLC needs are not always observable as pupils find ways to manage their difficulties (often called 'masking'). The best way to identify pupils 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.

Check your Statement of Intent

Look at how the actions in this section contribute to achieving your stated Statement of Intent.

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.



01 UNIVERSAL PROVISION

- ✓ Whole-class language screening
- ✓ Communication-supportive classrooms
- ✓ Vocabulary-rich teaching
- ✓ Staff CPD

02 TARGETED PROVISION

- ✓ Small-group interventions
- ✓ Structured progress reporting, monitoring and review
- ✓ Communication-focused resources and programmes

03 TARGETED PLUS PROVISION

- ✓ Individualised support plans
- ✓ Specialist advice through Experts at Hand
- ✓ Collaboration with families and external agencies

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. Checking language scores and intervention outcomes through before and after measures is vital. 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.



INCLUSION STRATEGY SPECIAL

FROM STRATEGY TO IMPACT:

using Speech Link and Language Link toolkits to drive inclusion



SPEECH & LANGUAGE LINK TOOLKITS

Language assessment, intervention and reporting

- Little Link (3-5 years)
- Infant Language Link (4-7 years)
- Junior Language Link (7-11 years)



Speech assessment, intervention and reporting

- Speech Link (4-8 years)

Professional development

SLCN training for primary and early years settings

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 children 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.

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 schools' and settings' local '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 and early years settings 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 arrange a free trial go to speechandlanguage.link/inclusion or have a look at the next page containing QR codes for our collection of useful resources.



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, consultant - speech and language in education, 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 the implementation of your Inclusion Strategy.

Find out more...



4

Learn more about the Speech & Language Link toolkits

A comprehensive set of assessment, intervention and reporting resources designed to help identify and support children with speech, language and communication needs.

Explore Speech & Language Link



5

Book a free, one month trial of any of the Speech & Language Link support tools

Run some language or speech 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...



LittleLink

Product review



Reviewed by **Abigail Hawkins**,
SENCO / SEN Specialist



The Little Link package by Speech & Language Link is an exciting and well-considered resource designed to support the language and communication development of children aged 3-5 years in nursery and early years settings. In a landscape where waiting lists for NHS speech and language therapy can stretch well beyond a year, and where early identification has never been more critical, Little Link addresses a genuine and urgent need.

At the heart of the package is a standardised language screening tool that enables early years practitioners to identify children who may be struggling with language development before they reach statutory school age. The screen is story-based and child-friendly, which is particularly important when working with very young children who are not yet able to engage with more formal assessment approaches. It provides an objective picture of a child's language skills in a way that feels natural and engaging rather than clinical. For SENCOs and early years leaders looking to fulfil their responsibilities under the SEND Code of Practice, having a reliable identification tool at this age is invaluable.

What sets Little Link apart from simpler resource packs is both the quality of its physical materials and the thoughtfulness with which they have been designed. The storybooks are genuinely high quality: beautifully

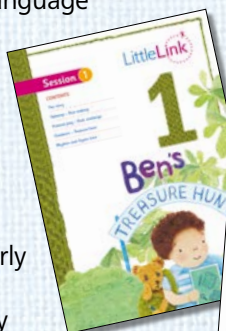
produced, engaging, and clearly created with young children firmly in mind. A particularly lovely touch is the consistent use of Ben and Teddy throughout all the materials, giving children a recognisable anchor across sessions.

The staff development strand of Little Link is impressive. **The Learning Log** is designed as a vehicle for genuine reflective

professional learning, guiding practitioners through the question of how to make this work in their specific setting. This is especially significant for PVI nursery settings, where a qualified teacher is not always present and where access to structured CPD can be limited. The whole-team approach to workforce development, supported by online training from speech and language therapists and access to the Speech & Language Link Help Desk, makes the package genuinely sustainable in a way that many comparable resources are not.

The package also explicitly supports the development of early pre-literacy skills, ensuring that children who have participated in Little Link are better prepared for the transition into statutory schooling and the phonics demands of Key Stage 1. In a climate where school readiness continues to be a national priority, this direct connection to later academic outcomes further strengthens the case for investment in the programme.

I would recommend Little Link as a valuable resource for any nursery or EYFS setting seeking to strengthen its approach to language and communication, and for those looking for a structured, therapist-informed pathway for identifying the children who need onward support.



Over 250

HAND-CRAFTED
ILLUSTRATIONS WERE MADE
BY HANNAH SANGUINETTI



SPELLING AND MEANING:

never a whisper apart?



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

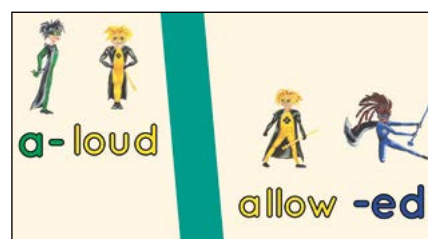
Spelling and meaning are closer relatives than you may realise. The purpose of spelling is to represent meaning, while meaning often explains spelling. The two should never be more than a whisper apart. So why is spelling too often taught as if meaning has nothing to do with it?

Phonics gives children an essential foundation, but what comes next often remains unclear. Many resort to providing lists to 'learn' each week. You know the drill: write it out ten times, then you'll remember for the test, right? Many learners are left guessing how to spell words, with

'sounding out' as the only tool they have. In the early stages of phonics we might expect, even celebrate, spelling errors like **sez (says)**, **wantid (wanted)**, **mist (missed)**. But as children progress through school, when we continue to see this type of phonetic error in words, such as **reacshon (reaction)**, we have a wider problem on our hands than simply teaching a few spellings.

In truth, our written language is morphophonemic, meaning that it is built from morphemes (units of meaning, or prefixes, suffixes and roots) as well

as phonemes (units of sound). If we only teach phonemes and phonics, we are failing to teach learners how to use the very purpose of words, i.e., meaning, to help them spell.



Teaching spelling is not simply a matter of practise and repeated word lists. Letter patterns are not there to be memorized but understood. Let's take the word **reaction**. The root is **act**, which we know from our phonics is spelt with a **t**. This helps with many other commonly mis-spelt words ending in the enigmatic "shuhn" syllable (**tion, sion, cian, ssion**): magic is **magic + -ian**, **tension** is **tense + -ion** (with the drop e rule applied), and so on. The meaningful morpheme is the key to the spelling.

Learners who are trained to recognise these meaningful links improve not only their spelling, but their vocabulary expands as well. Those elusive homophones can be explained by their morphemes: **allowed** comes from the root **allow** with the **-ed** suffix indicating past tense, while **aloud** come from the root **loud**.



So how does this work in the classroom?

- 1 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?"
- 2 Admit when you don't know something. You do not need to be a linguistic expert! You just need to know where to find out. I recommend online dictionaries, such as dictionary.com and etymonline.com to search for the meaningful parts of words.
- 3 Love language over lists! Teach spellings in morphological families.
- 4 Avoid complex phonetic word families that do not offer meaningful connections between words. So, instead of ten unrelated words ending in **le, el** and **al** (**table, tinsel, final** etc), find words ending in **-al** (**final, normal** etc) and explore the function of the suffix **-al**. Instead of teaching sounds together like **ide** and **ied** (**ride, hide, fried, tried**), look at the morphemes and spelling rules: **spied** = **spy** + **-ed** with the **y-i** rule, for example.
- 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: it doesn't matter which word you choose; all words start with a morpheme! **Light** can be built into **lighter, lightest, relighting** etc,
- 7 while **fertile** can be built into **refer, suffer, infer, differ** (fer meaning to bear).
- 7 Identify morphological errors in your learners' spellings: if they are spelling phonetically but incorrectly, they are possibly not linking the units of meaning with the spelling, leading to errors like "**wantid**", "**kict**" "**scatud**" "**happylee**".
- 8 Explore words together. Ask questions like:
 - a. What is the root/prefix/suffix?
 - b. Can you change the root/prefix/suffix for another?
 - c. Has the root changed at all when the suffix was added?
 - d. What is the meaning or function of the prefix or suffix?
- 9 Be spies for morphemes in texts your learners are reading and writing themselves. Why not use a morpheme hunt as a guided reading or editing activity?
- 10 Encourage talk about spelling and meaning together. Why do you think this word is spelt that way? Is a better question than "how do you spell this word?"



MORE INFO..

LOUISE SELBY
DYSLEXIA SPECIALIST

Louise Selby is a trainer, consultant, author and assessor in dyslexia, specific learning difficulties and literacy. She is 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

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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.

The Link Community quick win

Word detective

Choose a word linked to your current topic and invite pupils to become word detectives. Each time they hear, read or see the word during the week, they can add a tick to a class chart. The more often children encounter a word in different contexts, the more likely they are to understand and remember it.



Little Link gets the thumbs up from Sedlescombe Preschool

Following East Sussex's decision to introduce Little Link across all their early years settings, **Katie Hastings, Deputy Manager and SENDCo at Sedlescombe Preschool**, shares her experience of the programme and the difference it has made in practice.

"Thank you for bringing Little Link to our setting. I took on the role of implementing the Little Link programme. We have embedded it and made it part of our daily curriculum within the setting.

The focussed activities are a great idea to really get the practitioners thinking and engaged with the children.

The children love the books, and we have embedded the 3 rules: 'Good listening' 'Good sitting' 'Good looking'

at circle times and it's lovely to hear the children say them when we ask what our 3 rules are. We have done lots of promotion on our Facebook page to promote the programme.

We hope it is made mandatory in all EYFS settings as we have seen such enjoyment and progress from both children and staff."



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



Quick Quiz

Test your SLCN knowledge

- 1 How many words does the average child understand by age 5?
 - A) Around 500
 - B) Around 1,500
 - C) Around 5,000
- 2 Which of these is most helpful when giving instructions?
 - A) Giving all the information at once
 - B) Breaking instructions into smaller steps
 - C) Repeating instructions louder
- 3 How can you make your language easier for many children with SLCN to understand?
 - A. Wait for them to ask for support
 - B. Talk faster
 - C. Use shorter sentences and stress key words
- 4 Which classroom activity is best for developing vocabulary?
 - A) Seeing new words in different contexts
 - B) Repeating words back ten times
 - C) Learning a word list once a term
- 5 A child says, "Dog run." How can you best support their language development?
 - A. Ask them what words they left out.
 - B. Model a longer sentence: "Yes, the dog is running."
 - C. Tell them their sentence is wrong.

Score yourself!

- 1-2 correct:** Time to deepen your speech and language understanding. Keep going!
- 3-4 correct:** Speech and language champion in the making
- 5 correct:** SLCN superstar!

Answers
1. C 2. B 3. C 4. A 5. B



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





SLCN support within your Inclusion Strategy



The award-winning assessment
and intervention package for
pupils aged 4-8 years.

Trauma-Informed Guidance

Practical guidance to help practitioners understand the impact of trauma on communication.

NEW!

Classroom Essentials

A collection of ready-to-use resources and strategies to support language and communication throughout the school day.



Identify speech, language and communication needs early, provide targeted support, and track progress with confidence.

What's included?

- 👍 Whole-class language screening and assessment
- 👍 Structured interventions and over 400 teaching resources
- 👍 Universal classroom strategies and support materials
- 👍 Progress tracking and impact reporting
- 👍 Staff training and ongoing therapist support
- 👍 Suitable for multilingual learners and pupils learning English as an additional language



Infant Language Link is the Outstanding SEND Resource or Service BESA Award winner for 2026, its three key features of assessment, intervention and therapist support were highlighted by the judges.