

Early identification and why it's important for the pupils in your school



There are shockingly large numbers of children in the UK who struggle to develop their speech, language and communication skills. The impact of speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) can be wide-ranging and long term – affecting other areas of development as well as learning, attainment, behaviour, self-esteem and long-term prospects. If you're interested in the evidence around this, take a look at the I CAN Talk paper, "The Cost to the Nation of Children's Poor Communication".



The Code of Practice highlights the importance of early identification and makes clear schools' responsibility to have clear policies and strategies in place for identifying and responding to SEN. You can find more detail below.

The 2014 SEND Code of Practice puts emphasis on the importance of early identification and schools' role within this: *'All schools should have a clear approach to identifying and responding to SEN. The benefits of early identification are widely recognised – identifying need at the earliest point and then making effective provision improve long-term outcomes for the child or young person.'* (section 6.14 of the Code)

So, identifying children and young people who are struggling is vitally important – with early identification we can make sure that children and young people get intervention early.

And all schools **must** publish information on their website about how they implement their policy for SEN (known as the SEN Information Report). This **must** include information on *'policies for identifying children and young people with SEN and assessing their needs.'* (section 6.79 of the Code)

With the right early intervention, children make better progress, the longer-term impacts are minimised and many children can even catch up.

But, if we don't know who the pupils with SLCN are, we can't begin to provide the support that they need. Without the right support, evidence shows that needs persist and, for some, get worse.

Early identification isn't just about the early years though. Obviously, it's vitally important that children's needs are identified as early as possible, and the more children identified before they start school, the better. However, many children slip through the net.

At the moment, we know that although there has been an increase in identifying children with SLCN, this is not as big an increase as for those with other special educational needs and many children are still being

missed.¹ For example, we would expect 5-7% of all children to have specific speech, language and communication needs. However, we know primary schools only identify 2.3% of their population as having primary SLCN overall, and secondary schools identify a worrying 0.7%. So, at every stage of schooling, there are opportunities to continue to identify those pupils whose SLCN are likely to affect their outcomes.

What can schools do?

1. Have a policy for identifying early SLCN for your pupils
2. Look at evidence on expected levels of speech, language and communication needs and compare this with your own data
3. Review your current system for identifying pupils' SLCN
4. Check out any ways your system could be improved to make sure pupils who may have SLCN in your school are identified
5. Make sure this then links into support or interventions

Below you can find practical information on how to achieve each of these five goals.

1. Develop your policy on identifying SLCN (forming part of the identification of SEN required in the SEND 2014 Code of Practice)

- Who will be involved?
- What will it include?
- What's the process for developing it and sharing it?
- How will you know if your policy is effective and useful?
- If you are in an area that might expect high levels of SLCN, what is your approach to recognising potentially large numbers of pupils?

Useful things to include in a policy and process for identifying SLCN are:

- How to raise concerns about a pupil's speech, language and communication
- How to collect information on a pupil's strengths and needs
- How to involve pupils, their parents and carers
- Staff roles and responsibilities
- Resources and tools you could use
- Staff training and development needs
- How to link in to local services (see our guide, *'Working with speech and language therapists'*)

¹ Lindsay, G., Meschi, E., Micklewright, J., Vignoles, A., *The transitions between categories of special educational needs of pupils with Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) as they progress through the education system* Department for Education - DFE-RR247-BCRP11

2. Compare your current data with evidence

Look at your SEN register or school census data. How does it compare with expected levels of SLCN? If you work in an area of social disadvantage, how many of your children have delayed speech, language and communication skills? For more detail on this, see our factsheet on national prevalence.

National data	Our data
Around 7% ² of children and young people are expected to have specific speech, language and communication needs (primary SLCN)	
In areas of social disadvantage, often more than 50% ³ of children are likely to have delayed speech, language and communication skills	

3. Review your current system for identifying SLCN

- How are concerns raised?
- How is information on their strengths and needs collected?
- Who is involved, how and when?
- How are SLCN identified?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of staff?
- What tools and resources do you use?
- How are parents, carers and pupils themselves involved?
- What are your links with external agencies, such as speech and language therapy or educational psychology?

4. Some ideas to help with identifying SLCN in your school

- Have a think about pupils in your class or school you are concerned about. Because of the links between language and attainment, literacy, and behavioural, social and emotional development, we'd really recommend that if you have concerns about a pupil in any of these areas, you also take a little time to think about their speech, language and communication skills. Sometimes speech, language and communication needs can be the root cause of other difficulties and are often misidentified or missed altogether.
- Use an indicators checklist. This sets out things that you might see when pupils are struggling with their speech, language and communication. It will help you to separate things out a little and look more closely at your pupils' communication. There are lots of different checklists

² Meschi, Micklewright, Vignoles, Lindsay *ibid*

³ Locke, E., Ginsborg, J., and Peers, I. (2002) "Development and Disadvantage: implications for early years. International Journal of language & Communication Disorders" Vol. 27 No.1, pp. P.3 -15.

available: to start with you might want to look at [Don't Get Me Wrong](#) and [Universally Speaking](#), both available to download at www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk.

- Use 'ages and stages' information to help you profile where a pupil is at with their speech, language and communication. Speech, language and communication skills all follow expected patterns of development, so if you look at what a child should be able to do at their age, this will help to give a really clear picture across different areas and clarify if they are on track or not. Some useful tools for this are *Universally Speaking*, the *I CAN progress check* and the *Early Support School Years Development Journal*; links to these tools can be found in our factsheet, 'Ways to identify pupils who struggle'.
- Use structured identification tools – there are a number of commercially available screening or assessment tools which can be used in schools to identify pupils' SLCN. There may also be some locally developed materials available, so it would be useful to contact your local speech and language therapy service to find out more. The Communication Trust has a series of [Progression Tools](#) available for purchase, which were developed to support teaching staff in identifying pupils who may be struggling with their speech, language, and communication skills.

5. Linking identification to assessment and intervention

Once you have identified pupils, it's clearly vital that you make a plan to support their needs. For some pupils, this will include a referral to other agencies, such as speech and language therapy, for more detailed assessment of their needs.

In terms of planning support in your school, there are a number of routes which may be useful:

- Develop a provision map of needs in your school
- Consider your staff training and professional development needs – for example, you could take a look at the self-evaluation of knowledge and skills in the [Speech, Language and Communication Framework](#)
- Research evidenced interventions – take a look at '[What Works](#)', which is an interactive database of evidenced interventions for a range of speech, language and communication needs – this will help you select the most appropriate interventions for your pupils.
- Get in touch with your local speech and language therapy or specialist service; or there are a number of different not-for-profit organisations who may be able to offer advice, training or services. For details of your local service, visit www.talkingpoint.org.uk