

Communication and the Ofsted Framework

The Communication Commitment aims to help schools put communication at the heart of their work with pupils, and there are many good reasons why this focus is important.

We've been asked by schools to help them identify where their increased focus on communication can link to the Ofsted Inspection

Framework, so they can ensure their great work on communication also relates to Ofsted judgements.



In this fact sheet, we set out where and how the Communication Commitment relates to the different areas of the Ofsted Framework. This can help you use your work on the Commitment as part of your evidence or data towards the Ofsted process. For a wider link to school improvement, you may also like to read our fact sheet on 'Putting communication in your development and improvement plans'.

Communication skills have an important role across all four areas of judgement – the achievement of pupils, quality of teaching, behaviour and safety and leadership and management. Additionally, inspections also look at the extent to which the education provided by the school meets the needs of the range of pupils there, in particular pupils with SEN or disabilities, which includes the 10% of pupils with long-term and persistent speech, language and communication needs.

The following sections look at each area of judgement in the Ofsted Framework, outline key areas related to the Communication Commitment and suggest some particular activities which may be useful.

1. The achievement of pupils at the school

Increasing a school's focus on communication through the Commitment links strongly to this area of judgement in the Ofsted Framework.

Here, we've pulled out some key statements which are of particular relevance.

When evaluating the achievement of pupils, inspectors consider how well:

- pupils develop a range of skills, including reading, writing, **communication** and mathematical skills, and how well they apply these across the curriculum
- **disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs have achieved since joining the school**
- **gaps are narrowing between the performance of different groups of pupils, both in the school and in comparison to those of all pupils nationally**
- **pupils who are eligible for the Pupil Premium have achieved since joining the school**
- pupils are prepared for the next stage of their **education, training and/or employment**

Because language and communication skills are both the foundation and fundamental building blocks for learning, the links between communication and attainment are clear. There's evidence which shows that just the way teachers talk with pupils can influence learning, memory, understanding and the motivation to learn. The quality of spoken dialogue in classrooms can significantly improve children's educational

attainment, from increasing SAT scores in maths and science to improving reading comprehension, writing and reasoning skills.

As well as these links to attainment, the Framework includes a specific focus on pupils' communication skills in their own right – this reinforces the importance of communication skills across school life.

In many schools, particularly those in areas of social disadvantage, there are many pupils, often as many as half, who have delayed speech, language and communication skills. This means that they aren't equipped with the language that they need to access the curriculum effectively, which has consequent impacts on attainment.

Additionally, evidence shows that between 5-7% of all children and young people have specific speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) – often described as specific language impairment. Not only that, but pupils with other areas of SEN, such as hearing impairment, autistic spectrum disorders, learning difficulties and behaviour, social and emotional difficulties also have SLCN as part of their profile. This means that focusing on communication is not only vital in enabling the achievement of pupils with identified SLCN but is also essential for a much wider range of pupils with SEN.

Consider how increasing your focus on language and communication through the Commitment can help you raise the achievement of pupils and narrow attainment gaps for different groups of pupils. You might like to think about:

- Embedding a greater focus on communication in lesson planning and delivery. How about introducing space for a specific objective around communication on your lesson plans?
- Setting out how you will focus on measuring and improving all of your pupils' communication skills
- Identifying pupils who may be struggling with communication
- Selecting appropriate interventions which help pupils' communication skills to support more effective learning
- Breaking down some of the speaking and listening skills you want your pupils to develop and specifically target those. There are some great resources to help you with this available as part of *No Pens Day Wednesday*
- *Universally Speaking* has age related expectations on a whole range of speech, language and communication skills – including some of these in your planning can really help you see if pupils are on track or not and if there needs to be a more specific focus on particular skills for that group or individual pupils
- How you track and monitor pupils with identified SLCN. Use the fact sheet on *What Works* to think about how you assess the effectiveness of interventions you are using for pupils with SLCN
- How you can introduce targeted approaches for vulnerable groups focusing on communication to specifically support narrowing the attainment gap?
- How you could introduce an approach for effective identification of pupils who are struggling. This will really help you plan provision and provide a useful context for your data.

2. The quality of teaching in the school

Language and communication are the vehicle for teaching and learning in schools. High-quality teaching is underpinned by understanding effective communication in the classroom.

Here we've identified some of the key areas set out in the Ofsted framework.

When evaluating the quality of teaching in the school, inspectors will consider the extent to which:

- reading, writing, **communication** and mathematics are well taught
- **teachers and other adults create a positive climate for learning in which pupils are interested and engaged**
- **teaching strategies**, including setting appropriate homework, **together with support and intervention, match individual needs**

You'll notice that communication is one of the areas highlighted in the Ofsted Framework that inspectors will consider when making their judgment about the quality of teaching. Many of the individual actions in the Commitment will really contribute to improving the quality of teaching communication skills and indeed the quality of teaching across the board. We heard from one school who had participated in *No Pens Day Wednesday* – a day focusing completely on speaking and listening – when 'the inspectors were in'. They reported that the quality of teaching was rated more highly on No Pens Day than it was the day before!

Here are a few ideas as to how you use your work through the Commitment to enhance the quality of your teaching:

- Include clear ways to assess and measure the quality of teaching communication skills in your school. Why not include the teaching of communication in your observations?
- Develop a rubric for teaching communication – outline *What a Good One Looks Like* for lessons that will really focus on communication. You could use resources and lesson plans from *No Pens Day Wednesday* for ideas
- Identify professional development activities and approaches to support staff to develop their skills in supporting communication
- Try a 'learning walk' with a focus on speaking and listening to identify your school's excellent practice and where there are areas for improvement
- Use *What Works* – which is an interactive database which shows evidenced interventions focusing on communication or SLCN – to help you choose the right interventions for your pupils in your school
- Identify ways to share great practice across your school

3. The behaviour and safety of pupils at the school

While this area has a less explicit focus on communication, there is a growing body of evidence on the links between communication and behaviour. There is also a growing awareness of both how common communication needs are for pupils with behavioural difficulties and how often these communication needs are undetected. Studies suggest that 55-100% pupils with behavioural, social and emotional

difficulties have communication difficulties. For all pupils, however, positive behaviour is often built upon effective social communication skills and clear understanding.

Several studies have found that where children had been identified as having speech, language and communication needs early on, but didn't then receive appropriate support, they were more likely to develop behavioural difficulties than their peers.

Whilst the individual actions in the Commitment may not explicitly tackle issues of behaviour, schools have reported to us that a focus on communication has also brought about improved behaviour. Here are a few ideas as to how you use your work through the Commitment in relation to the behaviour and safety of pupils:

- If you have decided to appoint pupils as Communication Ambassadors, think about how you use them to model good communication to their peers. Work with your Ambassadors to run a discussion session on what it means to speak and listen to others with respect. If you have not yet appointed Ambassadors but are considering it, do read our fact sheet 'Empowering children and young people to become communication ambassadors'.
- Use your student voice mechanisms in school to gain feedback on styles of communication in lessons. How do they best engage in class? What helps them to listen? What helps pupils to continue a discussion?
- If behaviour is a key priority for your school, it may be useful to develop a policy and process to review the speech, language and communication skills of pupils who are of concern and provide support and interventions focusing on language skills as appropriate.

4. The quality of leadership in, and management of, the school.

Clearly, the quality of leadership and management affects all areas of a school's work but the Communication Commitment recognises the crucial role of school leaders in driving and supporting an increased focus on communication. Key links from the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement mentioned above will also apply as part of the quality of leadership and management outlined in the Ofsted Framework.

Inspectors will consider the extent to which leaders and managers:

- improve the school and develop its capacity for sustained improvement by **developing high quality teaching, leadership capacity and high professional standards** among all staff
- ensure that **all teaching staff benefit from appropriate professional development** and that performance is rigorously managed
- provide a **broad and balanced curriculum that meets the needs of all pupils, enables all pupils to achieve their full educational potential and make progress in their learning**, and promotes their **good behaviour and safety** and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
- **promote pupils' learning and progress in literacy**

Within the leadership and management section of the Framework, there is a key role for overseeing the sustained improvement of all the aspects of communication raised in the above sections, particularly around driving up attainment and the quality of teaching.

There is also a specific criterion around promoting pupils' learning and progress in literacy. Many schools have had a strong focus on literacy development; and while speaking and listening are part of literacy, it may be the case that reading, writing and spelling have perhaps enjoyed a stronger emphasis than spoken language skills in some schools.

Speech and language skills have a vital role in wider literacy development – many phonics skills are essentially based on speech; accessing text is dependent on understanding words and the way sentences and narratives are structured; and writing is reliant on strong oral language skills too.

For secondary schools, the 2013 Ofsted report *Improving literacy in secondary schools: a shared responsibility* highlights that 'Secondary schools that demonstrate effective literacy practice work to ensure good speaking, listening and communication skills are a focus of teaching across the whole school, in all lessons'.

If literacy is a key priority for your school, consider how a strong focus on spoken language could improve pupils' speaking and listening as well as supporting their written language skills.

5. The extent to which the education provided by the school meets the needs of the range of pupils at the school, and in particular the needs of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs.

Ofsted inspectors will be looking at pupils on the SEN register and how the school meets their needs. The Communication Trust and its partners offer schools a wealth of support and advice to help them meet the needs of pupils with SLCN.

The whole of priority area four of the Communication Commitment is dedicated to supporting SLCN, and you will find lots of advice, information and resources to help you.

A key part of effective support is the ability to identify pupils' needs effectively. The Better Communication Research Programme (BCRP) strongly recommended profiling and monitoring children's needs, in order to achieve effective identification and support.^{i ii} As a school you will also want to think about how you ensure accurate profiling and careful monitoring of progression for pupils with SLCN in schools, which is vital in order to ensure that their needs are met.

The Trust has tested ways of profiling children's needs through simple tools and techniques within schools, which have enabled identification of children and the ability to signpost different approaches of support, dependent on the child's profile. Please see our fact sheet 'Different ways to identify pupils who are struggling with communication'.

When planning your provision for SLCN, you might like to use the *What Works* database, which contains information presented in the Better Communication Research Programme about interventions for children’s speech, language and communication that have an evidence base.

The database allows professionals to search the site by a number of key criteria, including age range and the focus of the intervention, and also allows users to search alphabetically. This means that whether you are searching for a specific intervention, looking for one that might be useful for a particular child or just browsing, you’ll be able to find what you need.

6. Got a good idea? Share it!

Why not share other ideas about the Ofsted Framework through the ‘Share Your Stories’ function so you can highlight your good practice to other schools?

We would love to hear your ideas and to share them with others!

¹ McLaughlin, M.J., Dyson, A., Nagle, K., Thurlow, M., Rouse, M., Hardman, M., Norwich, B., Burke, P.J., & Perlin, M. (2006). “Cross-cultural perspectives on the classification of children with disabilities: Part II. Implementing classification systems in schools”. *Journal of Special Education*, Vol. 40 No.1, pp. 46-58

² Dockrell, J., Ricketts, J., Palikara, O., Charman, T., & Lindsay, G. (2012). *Profiles of need and provision for children with language impairment and autism spectrum disorders in mainstream schools: A prospective study*. London: DfE.