Talk of the Town

What can we learn from the way Talk of the Town implemented its whole school approach to Speech, Language and Communication?

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This report was written by the education and youth development ‘think and action tank’ LKMco. We believe society has a duty to ensure children and young people receive the support they need in order to make a fulfilling transition to adulthood. We work towards this vision by helping education and youth organisations develop, evaluate and improve their work with young people. We then carry out academic and policy research and advocacy that is grounded in our experience.

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Executive summary

Talk of the Town (ToTT) is a community focused approach to supporting the speech, language and communication (SLC) of children and young people aged 0-19, particularly those who live in areas of social disadvantage. The Communication Trust recently delivered ToTT as part of a randomised control trial that sought to evidence the programme’s impact on reading. A team from the Centre for Effective Education at Queens University Belfast (QUB) led the evaluation. The trial involved 32 control and 32 intervention schools and found that ToTT did not impact on pupils’ reading comprehension during the four term time period of the intervention (based on Granada Learning New Group Reading Test scores). The QUB study also to some extent explored the programme’s impact on oral language but found no overall effect on this secondary outcome for children with lower than the class average in reading comprehension.

This secondary evaluation report complements the RCT as well as a Manchester University led process evaluation, by exploring what can be learned from the programme. It focuses on four key themes that were identified from a broad base of evidence and by drawing on the delivery team’s experience.

Evaluation theme 1: The need to support early identification
Evidence from the ToTT programme shows that helping schools to identify pupil needs is the first step in putting appropriate support into place.

Over the course of ToTT, teachers’ and TAs’ assessments of pupils’ speech and language skills became more informed and accurate with practitioners reporting significant increases in their confidence in a number of areas. Assessment was not only important because it allowed support to be put in place, but because the process of assessing acted as a ‘wake-up call’ to a wider awareness of SLC across the board.

In some schools systems were implemented that were effective in supporting early identification and helping teachers respond to SLCN, suggesting that where possible, data collection and tracking of SLC should be integrated into existing school systems.

Evaluation Theme 2: The Importance of Effective Leaders
Evidence from the ToTT programme shows that initiatives need to be driven at a senior level and that leaders need expert support

The experience of delivering ToTT highlighted the crucial role senior leaders played in prioritising and driving forward a whole school approach like this. In some schools, senior level support seems to have reduced dependency on the Speech and Language Therapists (SaLTs) and ensured new approaches were embedded into whole-school systems and structures. Data gathered over the course of the programme demonstrates that the prevalence of SLC supporting practice increased and that practitioners reported increased confidence. Changes took place in schools in a range of contexts and at different starting points, suggesting the programme can be implemented in a range of settings.

Communication Leads were at the heart of the ToTT approach. These leads need to be well supported since they play a crucial role in sharing their newly developed expertise with staff, day-to-day.

Evaluation Theme 3: The Importance of Workforce Development
Evidence from the ToTT programme shows that effective workforce development depends on implementing a long term, structured approach, underpinned by expert support.

ToTT showed that expert-led sessions need to be followed up with flexible and practical support. Staff particularly valued the support provided by SaLTs and there were significant increases in staff's self-reported confidence in a number of areas of SLC practice.

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ToTT is a whole-school approach and Teaching Assistants (TAs) were heavily involved in training and played an important role in delivery of the programmes’ approaches. It is encouraging to note that TAs’ confidence in SLC grew over the course of the programme and in some cases they became champions for SLC, passing on the new skills they developed to others.

The ToTT resources helped support good practice and were linked to high levels of school engagement. It also appears that schools intend to continue using ToTT resources, and that this ongoing availability of resources may help ensure the programme’s long term impact.

**Evaluation Theme 4: The Use of Evidence Informed Approaches**

*Evidence from the ToTT programme shows that schools should be supported in implementing a combination of tried and tested universal and targeted programmes.*

ToTT drew on resources and approaches that have an established evidence base and pupils who took part in targeted interventions made progress with their speech, language and communication skills according to a set of practitioner assessed and non-standardised tools. Progress seems to have been particularly impressive with respect to children’s ‘spoken narrative’.

Targeted interventions did not stand alone and their strength lay in being combined with universal approaches at the classroom and whole-school level. Such universal approaches (including workforce development, a set of resources and weekly support from a SaLT) may have played a role in ensuring that pupils’ understanding of the importance of SLC increased.

In some cases, the challenge of combining both flexibility - in a fast-paced school environment - and fidelity to an evidence-informed programme as part of an RCT, led to tensions. Monitoring, balancing and maximising both flexibility and fidelity is therefore key.
Introduction

Talk of the Town

Talk of the Town (ToTT) is a community focused approach to support the speech, language and communication (SLC) skills of all children and young people aged 0-19, particularly those who live in areas of social disadvantage, which is based on evidenced approaches and interventions.

The programme was developed to help address the high levels of language delay that exist in areas of social disadvantage including:

- evidence that in these areas up to 50% of children may have communication needs (Locke et al., 2002; Law et al., 2011; Roulstone et al. 2008)
- evidence that children from poorer backgrounds who develop good vocabulary skills are more likely to break the cycle, and become more affluent in later life (Blanden, 2006)
- evidence suggests the quality of spoken dialogue in class can improve children’s educational attainment across the curriculum. (Cambridge Primary Review, 2009 and work completed by Neal Mercer)

The approach

The programme seeks to shift the way children’s SLC is supported at a universal and targeted level, underpinned by the evidence base around what works for supporting children’s communication. It has four core aims:

1. Early identification of children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN)
2. A joined up approach between parents and practitioners across health and education
3. Improved outcomes for children and young people, with improved SLC skills
4. A sustainable approach, so that SLC are integral to long term planning and practice.

ToTT aims to reduce the impact of poor language on learning by:

- building on what settings are already doing to support SLC through a thorough ‘context analysis’ that explores a school’s existing provision, policies and approaches to SLC support;
- providing workforce development for practitioners around speech, language and communication;
- embedding evidenced targeted interventions for children with language delay;
- supporting early identification of children with SLCN and linking with specialist services as required;
- promoting long term planning and sustainability;
- offering strategies to support parental engagement;
- deploying evidenced interventions and approaches.

ToTT was initially piloted as part of Hello, the national year of communication funded by the Department for Education (DfE). The pilot took place across a federation of schools (one secondary, three primaries and two nurseries) in an area of social deprivation in Wythenshawe, South Manchester from April 2011 until July 2012. Provision encompassed all key phases from Early Years Foundation Stage through to KS4 and included a strong community focus and working with parents to engage them in SLC support.

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2 Lindsay, G., Dockrell, J., & Peacey, N. (2008). Effective and efficient use of resources in services for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs.
4 Blanden, J. (2006). ‘Bucking the trend’: what enables those who are disadvantaged in childhood to succeed later in life?: a report of research carried out by the Department of Economics, University of Surrey and the Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions.

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Over the course of the pilot, an independent academic evaluation was completed by Manchester University which indicated positive outcomes against all four of the core project aims. Further funding was then provided by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) to test the programme through an RCT. The RCT sought to explore the impact of ToTT on reading attainment in primary schools (children age 5-11) over the period of two academic years. There was no specific funding to work with parents as part of the RCT, though support was provided where possible.

The ToTT RCT

The ToTT model deployed during the RCT involved a combination of context analysis, targeted and universal provision and support for sustainability and senior leadership. Speech and Language Therapists (SaLTs) played a key role in all elements of the approach and throughout the programme.

Context analysis

A context analysis took place in each school at the start and end of the project to review approaches, strategies and policies for supporting speech, language and communication. These involved:

- Classroom observations: these were completed by the SaLT for all staff using the Communication Supporting Classroom (CSC) Observation Tool (an evidenced audit). They were designed to look at a snapshot of classroom practice in terms of support for SLC;
- SLCF confidence questionnaire: this looked at staff confidence in identifying SLCN and supporting SLC development for all children;
- RAG ratings: these explored staff’s initial perceptions of children’s SLC skills, prior to expert input;
- Progression Tools: A sample of children RAG rated by staff as ‘green’ in terms of their SLC skills were profiled on the Progression Tool by the SaLT to explore the accuracy of teacher RAG ratings;
- Supported conversations: these took place at the start of the programme. They involved SaLTs, Senior Leaders and Communication Leads, and sought to develop a better understand of existing provision so that ToTT could be matched to context as appropriately as possible.

Targeted provision

Four evidenced, targeted interventions were introduced across the key phases as part of the ToTT RCT;

- **Talking Time for Early Years Foundation Stage**: this was made up of two programmes, ‘Group Talk’ and ‘Story Talk’ which were recommended to be delivered three times a week to small groups of pupils (no more than five children) who were identified as having language delay. The sessions lasted for fifteen minutes each over the course of ten weeks. SaLTs initially modelled delivery before handing over to Teaching Assistants (TAs).
- **Talk Boost for children in KS1 aged 4 to 7**: These sessions were targeted at children who had been identified to have delayed language skills and targeted five different aspects of language. Sessions were delivered to groups of four students and lasted approximately 20/30 minutes. They were delivered three times a week for ten weeks. TAs were trained to deliver the intervention (in a one day training session) and the SaLTs then provided support where necessary.
- **KS2 spoken language intervention**: This programme was based around a text and aimed at children with delayed language skills and targeted four areas of spoken language. The intervention was initially targeted at Years 5 and 6 with an adaptation provided later for Years 3 and 4. Sessions were delivered three times a week over ten weeks. Teachers and TAs were trained to deliver the programme by the SaLTs and TAs delivered it with support from the SaLT where needed.
- **Phonological Awareness**: A cross phase intervention that aimed to support phonological awareness and could be delivered at different levels depending on age and ability. This intervention was flexible; fifteen sessions were developed and the recommendation was for pupils to complete ten consecutive weeks of the programme. SaLTs modelled the intervention initially for the TAs to deliver.

Progression tools were completed before the intervention to ensure that children accessing interventions had profiles of delayed language; these were used again to measure progress following the interventions. Strategies from

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the interventions were adapted for the whole class so that teachers could link the interventions to whole-class work and use appropriate strategies when teaching the whole class and across the wider curriculum.

**Universal provision**

The programme sought to develop staff confidence and competence in identifying children with SLCN, and to successfully support the communication development of all children in class. To this end, all staff participated in an evidence-informed universal workforce development programme. This involved half termly training sessions for all staff (ten twilight training sessions in total). These were delivered by the SaLT and each session focused on a different universal topic (for example supporting children’s listening, teaching vocabulary, supporting talk in the classroom). Ongoing mentoring, coaching and in-class support was also provided by the SaLT to ensure strategies and resources were implemented appropriately.

A strong focus on early identification lay at the heart of the universal approach. The teachers rated all pupils’ SLC as red, amber or green at the start of the programme to provide their initial perceptions as a baseline. Their skills in identifying children who were struggling were then developed by supporting them to use a range of resources such as ‘Universally Speaking’ with the SaLT’s support to check and refine the accuracy of their ratings. The process involved three main steps:

1. Staff used ongoing RAG rating to reflect on children’s SLC and were supported by a checklist of top tips for spotting SLCN
2. Staff used ‘Universally Speaking’ to look in more detail at the SLC skills of children who were flagged at step one of the process
3. Progression Tools were used to profile children where there were specific concerns that were worthy of further exploration

Classroom observations using the CSC observation tool also played a key role in the universal offer. They were carried out by the SaLT (sometimes in conjunction with a representative from senior leadership) throughout the year. The observations then formed the basis of a communication focused development plan for each class teacher. Furthermore, therapists worked with all teachers to set communication targets, and to review these as well as to suggest strategies that could further integrate SLC support in class.

**Sustainability and support for senior leadership**

ToTT sought to make long term changes to support for SLC. A Communication Lead was therefore nominated in each school to drive the programme and champion SLC. They worked closely with the SaLT throughout the duration of the ToTT programme.

The programme sought to help senior leaders identify how they would ensure communication was embedded in whole school policy and planning. Senior Leaders and the nominated school Communication Lead(s) were encouraged to complete regular Learning Walks to review support for SLC across the school. These individuals were also able to attend termly cluster meetings with the project team from The Communication Trust to review progress, address any issues arising, share good practice and support sustainability.

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**The role of the SaLT**

SaLTs were commissioned from the local NHS SaLT service to support the ToTT project. They supported each school one day per week for two academic years. By working at a universal and targeted level of input rather than at a specialist level (with children who had clinical language needs), their role was different to the ‘traditional’ SaLT’s role. They had nine key responsibilities:

1. Observing classroom practice from a communication perspective - providing feedback to teachers with suggestions for further integrating children’s SLC skills
2. Planning classroom activities with teachers to integrate children’s SLC skills and needs
3. Modelling strategies to support and develop children’s speech, language and communication skills
4. Enabling collaborative working between TAs and teachers to support universal best practice
5. Supporting staff to select strategies and targeted interventions
6. Helping staff to maintain fidelity in targeted interventions
7. Working to support collaborative practice with parents
8. Leading staff training on SLC
9. Supporting staff with ongoing professional development

The SaLTs were supported by the Trust’s specialist advisory team to work in the universal and targeted way, drawing on current evidence and best practice relating to working in an educational context (rather than a medical one). This support included regular supervision and support sessions (sometimes in conjunction with the NHS lead), observation and feedback opportunities, peer training days and 'as and when' contact to deal with issues and queries as they arose.
The ToTT Learning Report

This report is intended to provide useful learning for the sector, including both schools and SaLTs, and to inform the development of the ToTT model beyond the RCT so that a scalable commissioned approach can be developed in the future.

The three main aims of the report are to:

1. Describe
   The report aims to describe the key features of the ToTT approach within the RCT and to outline what they are and how they work.

2. Evaluate
   The report seeks to supplement the EEF RCT evaluation report by reviewing evidence relating to ToTT’s impact on wider outcomes, beyond reading, and to understand the key influences on these outcomes.

3. Review
   The report highlights what was learnt about delivering ToTT by synthesising a range of sources and insights from the full range of people involved in the programme including pupils, SaLTs, teachers, TAs and the ToTT team.

The EEF RCT primarily focused on ToTT’s impact on reading. The trial involved 32 control and 32 intervention schools and found that ToTT did not impact on pupils’ reading comprehension during the four term time period of the intervention (based on Granada Learning New Group Reading Test scores). The QUB study also to some extent explored the programme’s impact on oral language but found no overall effect on this secondary outcome for children with lower than the class average in reading comprehension.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Conclusions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. There is no evidence that Talk of the Town had an impact on pupil’s reading comprehension.</td>
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<td>2. There is no evidence that Talk of the Town had an impact on oral language skills for children identified as having weaker reading comprehension skills.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Teachers valued the input and resources provided by The Communication Trust.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Teachers reported that the targeted interventions did not always provide the right level of challenge to the selected students.</td>
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<td>5. There is scope for further research on the fact that those with low literacy were more likely to move schools.</td>
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Thurston et al., 2016

Additionally, The Manchester Institute for Education carried out a detailed process evaluation of ToTT and noted that the programme’s unique selling points are that it:

1. promotes whole-school system change, promotes professional workforce development;
2. gives schools access to a SaLT trained to work in education (not as a clinician);
3. Focuses on the universal and targeted – rather than clinical need.

Ainscow et al., 2015

Over the course of the programme, The Communication Trust also gathered a range of evidence and this report draws this together to explore a broad range of the programme’s intended and unintended impacts as well as the factors that affected this.

This report is not intended to ‘measure’ impact, though it often describes it, since many of the effects that it highlights emerged from teacher and researcher feedback and observation rather than from any standardised measures of change over time. It therefore supplements the EEF’s more quantitative analysis of impact (on attainment in reading) and seeks to capture some of the wider benefits, which sometimes emerged in a subset of

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8 Ainscow, M., Bragg, J., Kerr, K., (2015), The Talk of the Town model (2014/15)

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schools depending on the setting and on programme implementation. We therefore unapologetically draw on anecdotal data and observation as well as un-standardised quantitative data in order to try and understand ‘what are the different ways ToTT might influence schools, staff and pupils; and what factors might shape this?’

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Methodology
Facilitated by LKMco, the ToTT team identified four core themes that appeared to underpin the ToTT programme and make it distinctive. These themes are partly based on the Manchester process evaluation as well as the team’s reflections on delivering and observing the programme. They were:

1. The need to support early identification of children with speech, language and communication needs
2. The impact of effective leaders
3. The importance of workforce development for all staff
4. The use of evidence informed approaches

The ToTT team then identified sub-themes, by considering the following questions:
- What did all schools and practitioners do as part of ToTT?
- What were the outcomes of the ToTT programme for schools, practitioners and pupils?
- What were the key factors that (positively and/or negatively) influenced these outcomes?
- What can we conclude from the findings and recommend for other schools, practitioners and SaLTs?

The ToTT team and LKMco worked together to identify what evidence related to each of the different themes and to refine the themes and sub-themes in light of the evidence available as well as to identify what further evidence might be needed in order to explore the themes further.

The evidence reviewed included the following:

Manchester Process Evaluation
Three reports which explored the process of implementing the programme.

Report One: September 2014 – Early implementation of the model
- Reports on findings from interviews conducted with a sample of schools, as well as the speech and language therapists in the first year of the project
- Data from interviews with staff from 15 of the 32 intervention group schools – a cluster of 5 schools were selected in each of the three project locations - Hull, Wigan and Stevenage/North Hertfordshire
- Reports on some of the initial challenges and successes of implementing ToTT.

Report Two: Refining the ToTT model
- Based on extensive interviews with members of the ToTT project team and some of the project speech and language therapists
- Maps out core principles underpinning ToTT, outlines KPIs for the programme and recommendations for future development.

Report Three: February 2016 - Overall reflections on ToTT’s impacts and future plans
- Draws together overall impacts of and challenges with implementing ToTT from the perspective of intervention group schools
- Reports on data collected from a range of interviews conducted with senior leaders, Communication Leads, teachers, special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) and teaching assistants from six of the intervention schools. Also draws on data from report one and two
- Designed specifically to link in broadly to the themes of this secondary evaluation.

Classroom Observation Data
Data from the “Communication Supporting Classroom Observation Tool” for early years and Key Stage 1 learning spaces, and a separate classroom observation checklist for Key Stage 2, as appropriate to the class. These observations were completed by the ToTT SaLT in up to seven lessons in each of the 32 participating schools. Each observation lasted no more than 60 minutes and sought to capture a ‘snapshot’ of classroom practice in three areas (Language learning interactions, language learning opportunities and language learning environment). Observers recorded whether or not each characteristic was present over the course of the observation and were carried out pre and post project.
Progression Tools
After teachers had rated all pupils in their class as red, amber or green (as part of the context analysis phase) four pupils rated green in each year group were assessed using a speech, language and communication Progression Tool, that used a combination of observation and questions to profile pupils’ understanding, vocabulary, sentences, narrative, speech and social interaction skills. This allowed the accuracy of teacher judgements to be explored. Progression Tools were completed for 612 pupils rated green at the start of the project and 747 rated green at the end.

Speech Language and Communication Framework self-assessment
At the start and the end of the project, all staff were asked to complete an online survey in which they were asked to rate themselves as “not confident”, “confident” or “very confident” in nine key areas. These areas were taken directly from the Speech, Language and Communication Framework (SLCF), which covers the range of competences required by practitioners to support speech, language and communication skills in children and young people.

294 match-able responses were collected and used to compare teacher confidence at baseline in each area. Distance travelled (the difference between baseline and endpoint assessment of confidence) was calculated and McNemar’s test was used to see if there was a significant (α=0.05) change in the proportion of practitioners who were very confident in each area.

Respondents’ roles were standardised as “Teacher”, “Teaching Assistant” (including “LSA”, “HLTA”, “Teacher aid” etc) and “leader” (anyone referencing a responsibility beyond their own classroom). Where several roles were cited, the most senior was selected. Baselines and “distance travelled” figures were compared for these three different roles.

Targeted interventions
Pupils involved in targeted interventions throughout the RCT were profiled by TAs using age appropriate Progression Tools before and after the intervention. Assessments included scores out of 15 for understanding, vocabulary, sentences, narrative, speech (not included for pupils aged 9-10 or 11) and social interaction. In each area, pupils were asked three questions and given a score of either 1, 3 or 5. These were then combined to give a score out of fifteen.

During analysis, scores of 0 were assumed to be missing values and baseline and endpoint scores for the match-able responses were compared. Proportions of pupils with ‘positive distance travelled’ were calculated based on these scores. It is important to note that scores were not moderated or checked. There are therefore important limitations to the conclusions that can be drawn from this data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Talking Time (early years)</th>
<th>Talk Boost (KS1)</th>
<th>KS2 intervention</th>
<th>Phonological Awareness (cross phase)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of pupils in sample</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>592</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of pupils involved</td>
<td>1010 assuming five pupils in each of the 202 groups</td>
<td>900 assuming four in each of the 225 groups</td>
<td>696 assuming four pupils in each of the 174 groups</td>
<td>464 assuming four pupils in each of the 116 groups</td>
<td>3070 (estimate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coverage</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

T-tests were applied for scores in each of the six areas for each intervention to assess whether differences between baseline and endpoint scores were significant (α=0.05).

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9 [http://www.ats.ucla.edu/stat/stata/whatstat/whatstat.htm](http://www.ats.ucla.edu/stat/stata/whatstat/whatstat.htm)

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Pupil voice: capturing the uncaptured
During the second academic year of the programme, members of the ToTT team visited schools and spoke to staff, pupils (particularly year 3 and 6 pupils involved in interventions as these were the two year groups involved in the primary evaluation testing) and where possible, walked around the school to see how things were working in practice. Notes from discussions with pupils under the following questions were used as part of this report to ensure pupil voice was represented:

- Have you heard of ToTT?
- Do you take part in small group sessions?
- Does your group have a special name?
- Why do you think you come to the group? Is it important? What do you learn?
- Are there any rules for talking in class? If so, what are they? Are they important?
- Is there a word of the week in class? If so, what is it and what does it mean?
- How do you ask for/get help?
- Do you think it's helpful/useful to attend the group? Have you got better at anything?
- Children's ratings of the groups. Likes and dislikes, including activities.

Case studies
- All project SaLTs were asked to write at least one short (1 – 2 page document) case study about an element of ToTT
- They were not given a ‘format’ for this but encouraged to use several examples and evidence (e.g. photos) from their own schools and write in their own words and style
- SaLTs were encouraged to write case studies focussing on one of the key emerging ‘themes’ of the project (the need to support early identification of children with SLCN, the impact of effective leaders, the importance of workforce development for all staff and the use of evidence informed approaches)
- All SaLTs completed at least one case study – some completed several on different aspects

Newspaper activity
Staff from 27 of the 32 schools were asked to reflect on the impacts of ToTT in their school and to comment on which (if any) aspects of ToTT they would commit to continuing in the future at the final universal staff training session in the summer term of 2015. These reflections were matched to the four identified themes of this secondary evaluation to illustrate them from a school perspective.

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The Evaluation Themes

Evaluation Theme 1: The Need to Support Early Identification

Evidence from the ToTT programme shows that helping schools to identify pupil needs is the first step in putting appropriate support into place

“Staff are able to identify children early and deliver quality, targeted support”

Primary School, Stevenage

1.1 ToTT showed that early identification of speech, language and communication needs allows appropriate support to be put in place in good time.

Schools were provided with an early identification framework including a universal training package and a range of resources to support early identification. Staff were trained to use these established tools and Speech and Language Therapists (SaLTs) worked with all staff, including TAs and teachers, to help them use the tools appropriately.

The primary aims of this process were to identify pupils with SLC difficulties that were not at a clinical level (i.e. who were rated ‘amber’ rather than ‘red’) and who required targeted interventions, and to ensure that staff were confident and consistent in their ratings.

What happened as a result?

i) Over the course of ToTT, teachers’ and TAs’ assessments of pupils’ speech and language skills became more informed and accurate.

The Manchester study highlights the fact that the RAG process helped build staff’s understanding of what age-appropriate SLC skills look like. This is corroborated by data from the SLCF self-assessment in that the proportion of practitioners who felt very confident that they knew what to look for in order to identify pupils with SLCN significantly increased, more than doubling from 22% to 54%.

“Teachers and TAs have widely reported that they are now much better able to identify children in this [amber] category.”

Manchester, 2014

This perceived improvement was experienced most acutely by teachers, with more than half becoming more confident in this area. However, TAs involvement meant that 40% of them also became more confident.

“TAs are taking the lead on opening up discussions with the class teacher about progression tool assessments.”

Communication Lead, quoted in Manchester 2016

The increased accuracy of teachers’ judgements is to some extent indicated by moderation of ‘RAG’ ratings. Four pupils rated ‘green’ in each year group were selected and assessed by the SaLT when the programme began and this process was repeated at the end of the programme. In autumn 2013, 54% of these pupils (n=612) were subsequently judged to be

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amber, suggesting that judgements lacked accuracy. However, in summer 2015, judgements appear to have been more accurate with this figure falling to 30% (n=747). It is important to note that moderation of amber and red judgements would have been useful too and should play a part in any future ToTT model.

“Talk of the Town has transformed not only the children’s confidence and skills but also the identification skills of the teaching staff.”

Primary School, Hull

- Between autumn 2013 and summer 2015 there was a significant increase in the proportion of practitioners who believed they were very confident of their awareness of what to look for to identify children and young people who may have SLCN.

ii) Over the course of ToTT, assessments of pupils’ SLC needs acted as a ‘wake-up call’, prompting teachers to pay more attention to SLC needs across the board

“As the children go through school, you become more aware of who the reds are, but it’s maybe the ambers you forget about, it’s those in the middle, so it’s good in keeping attention on them.”

Communication Lead, quoted in Manchester 2016

The consistent use of the RAG system as part of the ongoing ToTT professional development programme, meant that a broad group of pupils who would benefit from intervention were identified and that teachers became aware of many previously ‘hidden’ needs:

“It was only after doing the RAG rating exercise we realised how poor our children actually are on speaking and listening... We knew the children were below average, but actually it’s well below average and its widespread, it is across the school.”

Class teacher, quoted in Manchester 2016

One Communication Lead argued that assessing SLC specifically, helped uncover potential underlying causes of pupils’ difficulties in writing and maths.

“You’re looking at them because they’re not a good writer, or they’re not good in maths, but it may be because of a language barrier and you’ve got to look at that”

Communication Lead quoted in Manchester, 2016

1.2 ToTT showed that data collection and tracking of SLC should be integrated into existing school systems

Tracking SLC skills can be difficult, particularly in schools where data management already places hefty demands on teachers’ time. The Manchester University reports (Feb 2016 and Sept 2014), as well as Communication Leads’ and SaLTs’ progress reports highlight the crucial nature of establishing simple, well integrated processes. Where schools were able to do this it was found to be highly beneficial.
“We need a good tracking system for speaking and listening data – so we have the RAG rating system, and we need a system to sit alongside it which helps us to use the data and link it to other data so it supports other monitoring. We need to make different sorts of data and monitoring systems dovetail.”

Senior Leader, quoted in Manchester, 2016

What happened as a result?

i) Over the course of ToTT some schools put systems into place that supported early identification and responded to SLCN and teachers became more aware of, confident and informed in using these systems.

One Communication Lead explained that their school had put the process for collecting and tracking SLC ‘into the system,’ allowing data to be regularly interrogated and analysed.

In autumn 2013, more than a quarter of school practitioners said they were ‘not confident’ about existing systems for “collecting appropriate information about SLC.” By summer 2015 this had fallen to less than 5%, and 40% considered themselves ‘very confident’. The increase in the proportion of respondents who were very confident in this area was statistically significant.

Notably, more than half (55%) of ‘leaders’ increased their confidence in this area suggesting that school-level changes were taking place. However, only around a third (36%) of TAs increased their awareness of systems suggesting they were less involved in this area. Teachers’ increased their awareness of systems in 59% of cases.

ii) Over the course of ToTT, practitioners’ became more confident when it came to raising concerns about SLCN.

In order to impact on pupils, systems for monitoring SLCN need to drive follow-up action from teachers and schools when difficulties are identified. Encouragingly, practitioners reported becoming more aware of processes for raising concerns over the course of the programme. However, there was less progress in this area, perhaps because at the start, over 94% already considered themselves ‘confident’ in this area and 42% ‘very confident’. There was therefore less scope for measurable improvement. Nonetheless, there was a significant increase in the proportion of respondents who felt ‘very confident’.

- Between autumn 2013 and summer 2015 there was a significant increase in the proportion of practitioners who believed they were very confident of their awareness of existing systems for collecting appropriate information about SLC and the process for raising concerns.
Evaluation Theme 2: The Importance of Effective Leaders

Evidence from the ToTT programme shows that initiatives need to be driven at a senior level and that leaders need expert support

“The best Communication Lead was someone who was involved in senior leadership ... but also had a teaching role within the school. That way they could help to implement changes at the management level ... whilst also considering the effect of changes at the coal face.”

SaLT, quoted in Communication Trust Case Study

2.1 ToTT showed that the programme needs to be prioritised and driven forward at a senior level

As the Manchester study emphasises, Communication Leads were particularly effective in prioritising and driving the programme when they were members of the senior leadership team (SLT). They were then well-placed to observe classroom practice and manage school-level change – for instance by introducing new planning requirements which include the integration of SLC goals” (Manchester, 2015). In contrast, where the programme was insufficiently prioritised or resourced, for example where it competed with other initiatives, this could be a barrier to success.

“Sitting towards the top of the school, I can make it [ToTT] happen, as something that has to filter through planning, filter through assessment, that the SLT look at, something that teachers have to embed in their assessment and planning, which will make sure that it starts to filter into all the lessons. This is a really strong programme, and I need to show for my performance management that it works, I’m quite precious about doing it, so the TAs know that they are protected by me and I’ll make sure that they can commit to it, and the TAs believe in it and they want it to work so they put effort into making it work, and so the head supports that.”

Communication Lead and SLT member, quoted in Manchester 2016

On the other hand, difficulties were also noted where a Communication Lead had too many senior level responsibilities. The same SaLT (as in the case study) described one Communication Lead who:

“...wore so many hats [that they were] not there to spearhead ToTT throughout the week and ToTT activities only tended to happen on the given day that I was in; this wasn’t as effective for implementing a whole school approach”

SaLT, quoted in Communication Trust Case Study

Too much dependence on one SLT champion can also present a risk to the approach’s long term sustainability for example where a head teacher who has championed the approach leaves. This makes it important for there to be another senior advocate such as a Communication Lead who sits on the SLT.

Case Study 1

What set this school apart was the role the head teacher had in not only supporting the ToTT project and its objectives, but also in taking ownership of the objectives and making them suit the school’s needs. In order to change the mind-set of the school and introduce new activities, it has to come from the top down. Teachers’ school days are so busy that, in order to effectively change anything as a whole school it has to be from the management. When school management do not attend the training sessions, teachers can often see it as another INSET, rather than as a real opportunity to change school practice. In this school the head teacher was always present at each of the half-term staff training sessions and, with all [the] staff there at the INSET, discussed and looked as a team for ways to see how the strategies and advice given could be adapted to suit the schools pedagogy.

Case study by SaLT

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“Society should ensure that all young people receive the support they need in order to make a fulfilling transition to adulthood”
“We’ve got a new head coming in September so you just don’t know whether she’ll come along and say ‘you know what, we need to carry on with this, we need to buy into it again’. The head obviously decides what’s happening.”

Communication Lead, quoted in Manchester 2016

Where Communication Leads were not members of the SLT, senior leaders needed to compensate by taking an active role in supporting and monitoring speech, language and communication, as well as ensuring that the Communication Lead’s role was properly structured. This meant explicitly setting aside time for them to perform their role and providing adequate opportunities for them to feed into meetings where SLC forms part of the agenda (Manchester, 2014). Some governing bodies also supported the speech and language agenda by designating a lead governor for ToTT who monitored progress.

“The correct person for the job (of Communication Lead) is vital but if they are to be effective in school, they need the support and backing from other members of the schools senior leadership team, especially the head.”

SaLT in Communication Trust case study

One way leaders could engage with and prioritise the programme was by participating in a context analysis process that was completed at the start and end of the project. As part of the context setting activity, SaLTS worked with the school on a number of activities including the RAG activity, classroom observations, a teacher confidence survey and in-depth discussion about existing practice. Senior leaders received a report on findings which informed them about their school’s starting point for SLC provision and on their subsequent progress. It also provided the SaLT and ToTT project team with data that could help ensure that ToTT approaches were integrated with and built on existing practice. Leaders’ willingness to recognise gaps and shortcomings in provision and to use the analysis to shape the mix of approaches used, was key.

Where schools prioritised the programme, they timetabled interventions in such a way that there was capacity to release TAs to run groups. In some schools, this meant timetabling targeted interventions to take place in the afternoon whereas in others it was teachers themselves who were expected to work the interventions into their timetable and free up TAs. The Manchester report (2016) notes that the large number of pupils identified as having delayed language (or ‘amber’ needs) presented logistical difficulties in scheduling targeted interventions since schools had limited staff and physical space available for delivering groups. On the other hand, these logistical challenges were partly a consequence of the large number of pupils with previously un-addressed needs that the programme flagged up, and of schools’ willingness to implement interventions to address their needs.

What happened as a result?

1) Over the course of ToTT, senior level support reduced dependency on the SaLT

Since the SaLT was only in school for a limited amount of time, (one day per week), they could not be SLC’s sole champion.

“The SaLT is not positioned to have a strategic/sustainable planning role in the school”

Manchester, 2014

However, senior level support meant that SLC could permeate the school and approach to accountability.

[ToTT is] on staff meeting agendas, it’s on the governing body agenda, and it’s in my performance management targets, so I get a bit upset about it if it’s not working, so I think it’s infiltrated the whole school.”

Head Teacher, quoted in Manchester 2016

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“Society should ensure that all young people receive the support they need in order to make a fulfilling transition to adulthood”
**ii) Over the course of ToTT, new approaches were embedded into whole-school systems and structures**

The Manchester process evaluation showed that staff in a whole range of roles including TAs, governors, senior leaders and teachers began to engage in SLC and started to see it as a shared responsibility rather than simply the domain of specialists. Teacher surveys revealed increased awareness of adults’ impact on SLC development and observations of classroom practice using the CSC (see methodology) revealed changes in teaching with an increased prevalence of SLC promoting practice. This can be seen in increased median scores for ‘Language learning environment’ and ‘Language learning interaction’ as well as a change in the distribution of scores in the area of ‘language learning opportunities’.

![Chart showing increased awareness of adults’ impact on SLC development](image)

"Before it would have been ‘if you have a child with a problem you refer them to the SENCO’. That’s massively changing for us now”

**Senior Leader, quoted in Manchester 2016**

As one Communication Lead argued, new approaches had therefore begun to “universally flow through the school.”

“**It’s now part of the bricks and mortar of the school**”

**Primary School, Wigan**

Shifts in practice may partly be related to increases in awareness of the **“importance of identifying and assessing the impact of children/young people’s environment (including adults’ use of language) on SLC development”**. 46% of practitioners became more confident of their awareness in this area and there was a significant increase in the proportion of respondents who were very confident in this area. This change was particularly marked amongst practitioners who had leadership responsibilities, with 60% reporting an increase in this area compared to 39% of TAs and 50% of teachers.

- Classroom observations revealed at the start and end of the programme showed increased prevalence of SLC supporting practice
- Between autumn 2013 and summer 2015 there was a significant increase in the proportion of practitioners who believed they were very confident of their awareness of the **importance of identifying and assessing the impact of a child/young person’s environment; including adults’ use of language upon his/her SLC development**.
“Society should ensure that all young people receive the support they need in order to make a fulfilling transition to adulthood”
iii) Where schools engaged with ToTT they were able to change practice regardless of context and starting point
ToTT schools varied in terms of their current Ofsted rating and the degree to which they had previously engaged with SLC, yet feedback suggests that the programme was welcomed and valued across different and contrasting schools as the following ‘Pen Portraits’ show. This was also highlighted by the Manchester evaluation:

“It was possible for the approach to be introduced in very different schools contexts (and) schools perceived ToTT as beneficial irrespective of their starting points... the model can be introduced into very different school contexts, and used as a catalyst for change or integrated into existing school practices”

Manchester, 2016

Above: a newspaper compiled from staff feedback on ToTT during the final training session,
Pen Portrait, School 1:
On joining ToTT, School 1 was already an outstanding school, employing rigorous half-termly monitoring and review processes to help ensure children’s progress. It had already done a lot of work on SLC, had received training from I CAN, and had embedded a wide range of strategies and interventions across the school, including guided reading, and ‘Read, Write, Inc’.

The Communication Lead explained that taking part in ToTT was an attempt to see if they could refine their existing practice in order to have further impacts. She commented:

Communication Lead: ‘ToTT’s just tweaks for us really because SLC is already embedded.
Interviewer: So why get involved in ToTT?
Communication Lead: Because you’re never the finished article are you?’

Furthermore, she noted that ‘ToTT is trying to make something whole school, which we wouldn’t necessarily have done as [the school] works very departmentally and tailors interventions within departments for children with specific needs or not making progress.’ She went on to explain that because ‘ToTT is whole school you’ve got to change how you’re speaking, your environment. I think it’s going to impact more greatly on our Key Stage 2 staff because the way early years are run everything is already very visual, very interesting, the environment’s appropriate to what they need, and now it’s maybe Key Stage 2 taking on that approach’.

Manchester, 2016

Pen Portrait, School 2:
When it joined ToTT, this school was going through a difficult period. Its results were below national expectations, the school had an acting head teacher and consultations about the school joining a multi-site academy trust were taking place. While the school had previously had interventions to improve reading and writing, ToTT introduced SLC as a new focus.

As the head teacher recalled, prior to applying to join ToTT she went to an initial meeting to learn more about the initiative, where ‘a wake up moment was when [a professional director] from The Communication Trust said “there’s no point putting a reading intervention in place if the problem is language” and I thought how obvious is that.’

The school was already actively reviewing and (re)developing its teaching and learning practices and ToTT was able to feed into this change process. The head teacher further explained:

‘We have had lots of changes in the school in the last 12 months so the staff have been quite open to change and ToTT has just been another part of that... It’s really come at a good time – we haven’t done anything the same this year, with planning or whatever, so it’s fitted into our pattern of change.’

Added to this, ‘a big draw was that it would bring resources to the school... We were very excited to be chosen as things like that didn’t happen to our school’.

Manchester, 2016
2.2 ToTT showed that Communication Leads need to be well supported so that they can drive the SLC agenda

The primary role of the SaLT was to build capacity in schools around speech, language and communication.

“It’s not about the SaLT coming in and doing it to the school – that’s not her role she’s there to support me [the Communication Lead], not there to do it for us.”

Communication Lead, quoted in Manchester 2016

Each school’s SaLT provided support to teachers and TAs across the school and placed a particular emphasis on supporting Senior Leaders and Communication Leads.

“The Communication Lead and SaLT then worked together to devise a way to link the non-negotiables with ToTT strategies”

Manchester, 2016

Support was also available remotely from the central ToTT team and through termly cluster meetings that involved the project team, SaLT and Communication Lead. These provided opportunities to share best practice and address emerging issues.

What happened as a result?

i) Communication Leads developed skills over the course of ToTT that they were able to share, day-to-day with staff

In some schools, Communication Leads took responsibility for running follow up training after the initial training with the SaLT. They therefore acted as in-school experts who promoted and developed SLC. In some schools they were reported to be particularly effective in working with staff in classrooms to help teachers implement new approaches.

**Case study 2**

“[A Communication Lead] who was on the senior leadership team and also a class teacher... would often be the pioneer, having me in class to model and demonstrate strategies alongside her in the class. She would then inform other teachers and prepare timetables for the other teachers to have me [in class] to model the strategies.

Regular meetings together on the day I was in school, enabled [this Communication Lead] to tell me what had been tried throughout the week, so I had confidence that ToTT was still on the agenda even when I wasn’t there.

From the opposite perspective one Communication Lead wore so many hats in the school (Deputy, SENCo, Head of Curriculum) that we rarely got to catch up due to other meetings or non-classroom duties. In this instance, the Communication Lead was not there to spearhead ToTT throughout the week and ToTT activities only tended to happen on the given day that I was in; this wasn’t as effective for implementing a whole school approach.

A great Communication Lead has a fundamental understanding that speech and language in school underpins everything. They ensure that ToTT is at the top of the agenda by ensuring that all staff attend training...so that all staff are on the same page.”

Case study by SaLT
Case Study 3: An effective Communication Lead

Miss Cluff is a class teacher in Year 3 and on the senior leadership team. She is also the lead member of staff for English. This seemed to be the best of both worlds, a ‘hands on’ teacher, with her own classroom and with strategic links.

Miss Cluff wanted to turn her classroom into a place of ‘communication excellence’. She used a range of ToTT resources including word of the week poster, 10 seconds thinking time and listening cards.

Miss Cluff took an active role during staff training meetings by talking about how she had used ToTT strategies and encouraged teachers to visit her classroom so that they could be inspired to deploy the resources in their own classrooms.

She also worked with a Teaching Assistant who carried out the Key Stage 2 intervention. They worked together to RAG rate the children and dedicated time to delivering these activities regularly. The TA liaised with other TA’s who were delivering the same resource.

The SaLT who worked with Miss Cluff felt that she had several qualities which made it easy to work with her: she was committed to the project, organised, approachable and took a lead on cascading information to the rest of the school group. She also made time to attend meetings with other Communication Leads across the local intervention schools.
Evaluation Theme 3: The Importance of Workforce Development

Evidence from the ToTT programme shows that effective workforce development depends on implementing a long term, structured approach, underpinned by expert support.

3.1 ToTT showed that expert-led sessions need to be followed up with flexible and practical support.

“If I’d had more intense training without the modelling, I don’t think that would’ve been so effective”

TA, quoted in Manchester 2016

Evidence on effective CPD in education highlights the importance of avoiding one-off CPD sessions and the need for ongoing support that helps teachers implement changes in practice (Cordingley, 2007¹⁰). The ToTT programme delivered this type of approach because it was based on ongoing expert input and support from the SaLT through further INSET sessions and tailored in-class support for teachers. This sought to ensure good practice was embedded across the curriculum.

“The turning point for me was being in class and demonstrating the universal activities and resources, and supporting teachers to implement them into their lesson plans. This was the light bulb moment for many teachers, as they suddenly became more aware of their students difficulties (e.g. which children struggled with group work, which students had poor vocabulary knowledge), and could directly see how the ToTT resources supported children’s learning of these key communication skills.”

SaLT, quoted in Communication Trust Case Study

Although there were certain core elements to ToTT, the approach to workforce development remained flexible and responsive. As we saw in section 2, teachers worked with SaLTs to agree approaches that fitted their particular students’ and classes’ needs. This depended on close collaboration between class teachers and SaLTs, and on the SaLT building strong relationships with all staff.

“When the SaLT came in and did classroom observations, she spoke to us about how we could improve things in class. She was very focused and because she’s a SaLT she really knows what she’s looking for and how to tell you in a positive way as well. I don’t feel when I’m being observed by the SaLT that she’s making a judgement on me. It’s very, very supportive... doesn’t make you feel like you should already know that. She doesn’t just give you one strategy, she says try it this way, or this way, she does try to consider you and your teaching style.”

Classroom teacher, quoted in Manchester 2016


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“Society should ensure that all young people receive the support they need in order to make a fulfilling transition to adulthood.”
At times, teachers felt overwhelmed by too much content from training sessions and struggled to put changes into practice.

“There’s the beginnings of the buy in, but in reality we have a staff meeting, we get loads of brand new information and resources and a lot packed into the hour’s training [with the SaLT], and we write an action plan, and we go home, and life and work then get in the way”

Communication Lead, quoted in Manchester 2016

“I’ve said to our SaLT, ‘I’m really sorry, I’ve not had the opportunity to try this, because I’m still trying to embed that’”

Teacher, quoted in Manchester 2016

In order to improve the programme, these teachers emphasised the need to focus on one thing at a time and to fully implement that before moving on to the next technique. Some schools staff also criticised some of the universal training; one speculated that “if you asked staff what they think about staff meeting training sessions they would say ‘yawn yawn’”. Over the course of the programme, feedback like this led to modifications that sought to allow more time to embed new approaches and to ensure that universal training was more practical rather than overly information based.

In order to be as effective as possible, SaLT’s therefore have to be skilful in developing the workforce by introducing new techniques and then gradually stepping back and supporting teachers. Case Study 3 reveals the way one SaLT went about this.

Case study 4
In staff training, many teachers were eager to try the resources, and would frequently discuss different ways to use them. However, teachers often felt unsure how to implement them or what they would look like in practice e.g. how to introduce group role hats in class (where children are assigned roles for group discussions to ensure that everyone is clear on their responsibilities in the group).

Although I am not a qualified teacher, I created lesson plans using the resources in collaboration with the teacher, then led the class for that hour under the supervision of the teacher. We would discuss the resource afterwards and plan ways in which they could be implemented across the curriculum.

As the project progressed, there was a conscious shift for me as a SaLT to take less of a role in implementing and modelling resources, but rather to help steer ideas, observe practice, or to be there as a source of advice if needed.

This helped to ensure two things - firstly, that teachers feel the resources are free to be adapted and that there is no set rule to their use; secondly, so that once my support in school comes to an end teachers still see the resources as valuable tools, and that speaking and listening continue as important factors to consider and cater for in their lesson plans. Fundamentally, this shift also supported the school to implement the programme most effectively.

SaLT, quoted in Communication Trust Case Study
What happened as a result?

i) Over the course of ToTT, staff reported increases in their confidence in supporting the SLC development of all children in class.

ToTT enhanced staff’s expertise and broadened their range of approaches and activities for supporting SLC:

Whilst it is worth considering what the programme can do to target half, to a third of these practitioners who did not report an improvement, it is very encouraging to note that these changes were highly statistically significant.

“It could be argued that one of ToTT’s most significant impacts has been its ability to enhance professional knowledge about SLC within schools”

Manchester, 2016

SLC supportive strategies were described by one Communication Lead as having become ‘part of their (teachers’) individual teaching toolkits’ (Manchester 2016). This has the potential to be one of the programmes most sustainable impacts, since ongoing interventions, staff training and support from a SaLT are dependent on funding and SLT support but, once embedded, developments in staff skill have the potential to continue well after the programme finishes.

Overall, it appears clear that most practitioners who were involved in ToTT increased their knowledge and understanding of SLC over the course of the programme and it seems likely that this will continue to impact on pupils in the future.

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“Society should ensure that all young people receive the support they need in order to make a fulfilling transition to adulthood”
Almost two thirds (64%, 97) of practitioners who were not ‘very confident’ of their awareness of ‘positive ways to communicate with children and young people’ at the start of the programme increased in confidence by the end of the programme. There was a significant increase in the proportion of practitioners who were ‘very confident’ in this area by the end of the programme.

Just over half (55%, 132) of who were not ‘very confident’ of their awareness of ‘positive strategies to support SLC development of children and young people with whom they work’ at the start of the programme increased in confidence by the end of the programme. There was a significant increase in the proportion of practitioners who were ‘very confident’ in this area by the end of the programme.

Almost two-thirds (63%, 97) of practitioners who were not ‘very confident’ of their awareness of ‘some of the features which promote a positive communication environment’ at the start of the programme increased in confidence by the end of the programme. There was a significant increase in the proportion of practitioners who were ‘very confident’ in this area by the end of the programme.

Many went all the way from describing themselves as ‘not confident’, to ‘very confident’ over the course of the programme.

iii) SaLT’s involved in ToTT were valued by teachers and built staff capacity across the school

“Schools were overwhelmingly positive about the involvement of speech and language therapists (SaLTs) in the project. SaLTs were able to build the capacity of school staff… Modelling by the SaLTs had a particularly strong impact on developing staffs’ understandings and practices with respect to SLC”

Manchester, 2016

Although the RCT focused on reading attainment in two year groups, SaLT’s supported teachers across the school through training, coaching, mentoring and modelling in order to ensure that ToTT’s whole-school approach to SLC was implemented.

“While the RCT had an explicit focus on attainment in two key year groups, a number of schools reported that staff outside these year groups were often keen to be more fully involved in ToTT activities, and had started to work directly with the SaLT”

Manchester, 2016

3.2 ToTT showed that TAs should be fully involved in CPD and used to reinforce learning from the intervention in class

A strong focus on training and careful deployment of TAs helped empower and upskill TAs so they could play a full part in implementing new approaches. Ensuring they had protected time to contribute to the programme and work with teachers was crucial.

TAs worked with pupils in a range of different ways, in some cases they were attached to a specific class, in others they worked across a key stage. Meanwhile, in some they primarily worked with pupils in discrete targeted sessions whereas in others they focused on reinforcing strategies in classrooms. There were however concerns that linking TA’s and teachers work together and sharing knowledge could be challenging since schools do not always provide time for

“Schools should provide sufficient time for TA training and for teachers and TAs to meet out of class to enable the necessary lesson preparation and feedback.”

Sharples, Webster and Blatchford, 2015

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“Society should ensure that all young people receive the support they need in order to make a fulfilling transition to adulthood”
joint-planning and reflection. Indeed one of the key recommendations of the EEF’s recent ‘Making best use of Teaching Assistants’ report\(^{11}\) highlighted this issue.

What happened as a result?

\textit{i) Over the course of ToTT, TAs developed new skills and became more confident with regard to SLC}

For each indicator on the SLCF self-assessment, at least a third of TAs increased their confidence. In most areas though compared to senior leaders and teachers, TAs were the practitioners who were least likely to report increases in confidence. The exceptions to this were:

- Awareness of the process for raising concerns about the SLC development of children and young people
- Awareness of positive ways to communicate with children and young people

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
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    symbolic y coords={Process for raising concerns about the SLC development of children and young people, That there is a range of reasons for a child or young person to have SLCN, It is also important to identify & assess impact of child or YP’s environment..., What to look for to help identify children and young people in your workplace who may have SLCN, Existing systems where you work for collecting appropriate information about SLC, The role of communication in getting the views of children and young people, Some positive strategies to support SLC development of children and young people with whom you work, Some of the features which promote a positive communication environment, Positive ways to communicate with children and young people},
    x tick label style={align=center},
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    xtick={0,5,10,15,20,25,30,35,40,45},
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]
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(0,That there is a range of reasons for a child or young person to have SLCN)
(0,It is also important to identify & assess impact of child or YP’s environment...)
(0,What to look for to help identify children and young people in your workplace who may have SLCN)
(0,Existing systems where you work for collecting appropriate information about SLC)
(0,The role of communication in getting the views of children and young people)
(0,Some positive strategies to support SLC development of children and young people with whom you work)
(0,Some of the features which promote a positive communication environment)
(0,Positive ways to communicate with children and young people)
};
\end{axis}
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

\textit{ii) Over the course of ToTT some TAs became champions for SLC, passing on their new skills and helping to implement the programme}

Running specialist interventions helped to empower TAs who learned new skills and were described as ‘owning’ the interventions. In some cases this meant they were able to take their knowledge back to the classroom in order to improve the quality of in-class support that they provided.

\textit{“Sometimes it takes a little bit of reminding, they (pupils) don’t always seem to transfer the information that they’ve learnt in the group into their work... but as soon as you say ‘ooh, you know, remember we did that in our phonological awareness last week’ then it would twig and they were able to separate sounds in words”}

\textit{TA, quoted in Manchester 2016}

\(^{11}\) http://maximisingtas.co.uk/assets/content/ta-guideportrait.pdf

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“Society should ensure that all young people receive the support they need in order to make a fulfilling transition to adulthood”}
They also helped ensure that the programme of activities was implemented and that support for SLC was an ongoing focus in class. The Manchester study (2014) reports that TAs were seen to:

- help embed ToTT activities in whole class learning;
- play an important role in training other staff and maintaining interventions so that ToTT activities become embedded across the school;
- support planning about which children should take part in interventions (where they had particular responsibility for Progression Tools).

In some cases, TAs themselves were able to play a role in developing teaching staff:

”Some TAs have played a central role in training other staff to deliver interventions and to use progression tools, replicating the process they initially followed with the SaLT. TAs have, in some instances, also been central to implementing universal strategies in the classroom.”

Manchester, 2014

Whilst it would not be possible - or appropriate, to train TAs to deliver all interventions, since some require specialist SaLT support, it is encouraging to see that TAs were able to take ownership of the programme and become advocates for it.

3.3 ToTT showed that high quality resources can support schools’ development of good practice in SLC

A range of resources were developed to support teachers in making changes to their practice that would improve pupils’ SLC. Resources therefore played a key role in the universal element of the programme which in turn was intended to reinforce learning from the more targeted elements of the programme.

”Because of the resources and everyone has displayed them in their classrooms, the children as well as the staff are a lot more interested and doing things about communication we never did before”

Senior Leader, quoted in Manchester 2016

Resources included posters, activity sheets and prompt cards which were thought to be particularly important in embedding universal approaches:

*Society should ensure that all young people receive the support they need in order to make a fulfilling transition to adulthood*
“Schools reported that those universal strategies which had become most embedded to date were those with good ready-made materials, and which could be integrated with minimal planning – for instance, good listening, sitting and looking posters and prompts, the conscious use of tier two vocabulary, calling the register in a different order to promote good listening. Strategies schools were developing to make ToTT easier to embed included: creating central resource banks with suggestions for Word of the Week, Idiom of the Week, jokes, reward certificates/stickers for demonstrating good listening etc; scheduling ToTT activities at appropriate times – e.g. having a 15 minute slot for ToTT activities after registration on a set day to introduce Word of the Week or Idiom of the Week. Schools also reported that it was beneficial to have a dedicated quiet space or room for interventions and displaying ToTT materials”

Manchester, 2014

What happened as a result?

i) Use of ToTT resources over the course of the programme, seemed to be linked to high levels of school engagement

The ToTT team highlighted the very visible use of resources that they observed in many - but not all, of the schools they visited. They noted that:

“It seems that the schools who had more visual evidence of ToTT happening in their classes, the more engaged the setting presented as being”.

Manchester, 2016

Of course it is very possible that high profile, visuals were a consequence of high levels of engagement rather than the cause.

ii) The ongoing availability of resources may help ensure the programme’s long term impact

Resources are likely to play a role in the programme’s legacy with some schools saying that when the programme ends they will use the resources to ensure professional development can continue and that SLC supportive approaches are maintained in the long run.

“I know that I’ve got all the resources all ready to go and that I could go home and read the lesson plan and be confident to run it”

TA, quoted in Manchester 2016
Evaluation Theme 4: The Use of Evidence Informed Approaches

Evidence from the ToTT programme shows that schools should be supported in implementing a combination of tried and tested universal and targeted programmes

“Communication has dramatically improved and children are now able to discuss topics across all subjects.”

Primary Academy, Stevenage/North Herts

4.1 ToTT showed that programmes should draw on resources and approaches that have a strong evidence base

All of the interventions and approaches used in the ToTT RCT were evidenced to at least a “moderate” level according to the “Better Communication Research Programme.” Programmes and approaches were selected that offered support for a range of SLC needs, across ages and school phases, including broad language and phonological processing skills.

For the universal training component of the programme, topics such as supporting classroom talk; helping children to listen; and robust vocabulary teaching, were selected for inclusion based on evidence of their role in improving classroom practice.

What happened as a result?

i) Over the course of ToTT pupils who took part in targeted interventions made progress with their speech, language and communication skills.

Pupils involved in targeted interventions were profiled in six areas and given a raw score that was then converted to a score out of fifteen in each area at the start and end of interventions (see methodology). Following initial support from the SaLT, these assessments were largely carried out by TAs using light touch Progression Tools. Whilst this means the scores are non-standardised and should be treated with caution, the process meant that schools began to establish more systematic ways of monitoring SLCN.

As would be hoped from interventions that have an established evidence base, pupils involved in targeted interventions made progress in all six SLC areas featured in the Progression Tool profile (full statistics can be found in the appendix).
- Amongst those involved in the **Key Stage 2** intervention, ‘narrative’ was the area in which the most pupils made progress (70%, 158); ‘vocabulary’ was the area in which the fewest increased their score (55%, 125). Endpoint scores were significantly higher compared with baseline scores on each dimension.
- Amongst those involved in **Phonological Awareness**, ‘narrative’ was also the area in which the most pupils made progress (77%, 32). ‘Sentences’ was the area in which the fewest increased their score (55%, 125). Understanding, vocabulary and speech were significantly higher at endpoint compared with baselines.
- Amongst those involved in **Talk Boost**, ‘narrative’ was also the area in which the most pupils made progress (75%, 178); ‘vocabulary’ was the area in which the fewest increased their score (61%, 145). Endpoint scores were significantly higher than baseline scores in each area.
- Amongst those involved in **Talking Time**, ‘Sentences’ was the area in which most pupils made progress (95%, 79); ‘vocabulary’ was the area in which the fewest increased their score (51%, 42) however this effect was still a significant increase.

Whilst it is impossible to attribute increases in pupils’ scores to the interventions specifically and one would of course expect pupils to make some progress in these areas over time, the apparent effectiveness of the interventions over a relatively short period of time, is consistent with the established evidence.

Pupils themselves reported that they enjoyed the groups they were part of and could describe the benefits.

"Yes, because I usually get stuck in literacy. It helps me to use better pronunciation"

"Learning how to spell words. Learning how to pronounce words. Learning how to use words"

Others reported enjoying the groups but did not describe specific benefits:

"Because I like going"

"We do some games"

*Pupil quotes, collected by the Communication Trust*

### 4.2 ToTT showed that targeted interventions should be combined with universal approaches in order to maximise impact on SLC

Rather than solely offering a menu of discretely provided targeted interventions, ToTT combined these with universal approaches which were fundamental to the overall programme. Such strategies included workforce development (including training, mentoring and coaching from the SaLT) as well as strategies like Word of the Week, Word Webs and Word Scales, Group Hats and good listening games.

Whilst the targeted interventions programmes were designed for children with language delay, what the children learned in the groups was consolidated through universal approaches in the classroom. Explicitly planning for links between intervention activities and universal provision, meant that teachers and TAs were able to constantly reinforce learning from the intervention groups and ensure that all pupils experienced a communication supportive environment.

“Our school has become the home of confident talkers who now understand the importance of good communication”

*Primary School, Wigan*
What happened as a result?

i) Schools reported that over the course of ToTT, pupils’ understanding of the importance of SLC as well as their abilities increased

Schools reported a range of benefits that extended beyond pupils involved in interventions.

Vocabulary use was described as increasingly confident, varied and ‘adventurous’.

“In KS1 and KS2, we have wider word use and have seen a huge jump in vocabulary. Children are interested and more confident about using words.”

Primary School, Wigan

Importantly, teachers reported that these changes in pupils’ communication and language use were visible both “in and out of the classroom” (Primary School, Wigan) and stated that pupils were applying their learning “not only in the classroom but across the whole school” (Primary School, Hull)

“Children use a wider vocabulary and can talk about all the words they have learnt throughout the year. Parents regularly report that their children are talking more at home – impressing them with their special words.”

Primary School, Wigan
Changes in pupils’ listening were also emphasised, with teachers explaining that pupils had a clearer understanding of what was involved in listening well and that this had led to changes in their behaviour.

“If you didn't have talking skills, people would start arguing”  

*Pupil*

“Whenever you mention the words ‘good listening’ or ‘how to be a good listener’ I see that all the children across the school who’ve done this know what skills you need to be a good listener. And although they don’t always remember it, as soon as you say those words they know exactly what skills they need to use to be a good listener”  

*TA, quoted in Manchester 2016*

**4.3 ToTT showed the importance of monitoring and maximising intervention fidelity whilst maintaining flexibility**

The ToTT team made recommendations for delivery based on the interventions’ research base, for example how many sessions were needed and how to select pupils. However, more guidance may be needed on exactly what elements needed to be followed:

“It might also be helpful for The Communication Trust to provide some guidance about which aspects of the different interventions have to be followed to achieve maximum impact and which aspects might be adapted in school.”  

*Manchester, 2014*

Whilst part of a SaLT’s role was to monitor and reinforce fidelity, with only one day a week in school they could not take full responsibility for this; sessions were often missed and other school priorities sometimes hindered delivery and fidelity.

Although fidelity is crucial, schools needed flexibility in order to integrate the programme into their particular context. For example by taking their own approach to timetabling interventions

“Although, on the one hand, ToTT is a prescribed model with non-negotiable elements (not least in its use of targeted interventions which must be implemented with fidelity), on the other, it remains sufficiently flexible to be able to be responsive to individual school’s existing priorities, resources, structures and processes. Schools taking part in the ToTT initiative were able to make different arrangements for implementation suited to their particular circumstances”  

*Manchester, 2016*
i) Over the course of ToTT there were sometimes tensions between flexibility and fidelity

Since the evidence behind approaches and interventions is based on prescribed frequencies and durations, there was a risk that where fidelity was compromised, so was impact. However, an overly rigid approach in fast moving schools could be obstructive and lead to difficulties in overall implementation. This difficult trade-off required careful negotiation that was sensitive to both the schools’ needs and the demands of robust implementation and the requirements of a randomised control trial.
Conclusion

The ToTT programme is popular with teachers and pupils and has led to changes in practice and culture in participating schools. Schools and classrooms have become more SLC friendly and professionals, including teachers, TAs and school leaders have developed greater confidence and expertise in the area.

Certain fundamental elements lie at the heart of the ToTT programme:
- Early identification;
- Supportive leaders (including Communication Leads);
- Workforce development;
- Evidence-informed approaches that combine targeted and universal provision.

These elements seem to have played an important role in ensuring delivery was well-received, whilst SaLTs were at the heart of the approach - modelling, supporting and embedding these approaches.

Data collected over the course of the programme provides promising indications of ToTT’s potential positive impact in relation to communication supportive classroom practice, specific SLC skills amongst pupils and practitioners’ confidence in assessing and developing SLC skills. Collecting data in these areas more reliably, systematically and in a more standardised form in the future will help ensure that ToTT measures what it values, and that it goes on to develop a credible evidence base in these areas.
Statistical appendix

This appendix includes full statistical analysis of pre and post assessments of pupils involved in interventions\(^\text{12}\). It is important to note that these assessments were carried out by teachers and teaching assistants and not standardised.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Significant effects (at α=0.05) are highlighted and sample sizes given for each measure and intervention</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
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<td>KS2 intervention</td>
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<td>Phonological Awareness</td>
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<td>Talk Boost</td>
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<td>Talking Time</td>
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Pre and post scores: Talking Time – early years

Pre and post scores: Key Stage 2 Intervention

\(^\text{12}\) Note that these interventions were already selected on the grounds that they had an established evidence base.

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