



CASE STUDY

Knowle DGE Learning Centre, Bristol

Context

Knowle DGE is a large special school in Bristol, designated for young people from Key Stages 1-5 who have Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs and/or Speech, Language and Communication Needs and Autistic Spectrum Conditions.

How it started

At Knowle DGE we firmly believe that behaviour is communication. A large proportion of our learners have underlying speech, language and communication needs that are not always immediately apparent. Sometimes what can be seen as non-compliant or 'acting out' behaviour is often masking hidden language needs. Due to Knowle DGE recognising that many learners had hidden or undiagnosed language and communication needs, we commissioned Speech and Language Therapists from Child Speech to start working with us to develop and embed communication across the whole Learning Centre.

Planning

We started by looking at where we were with communication as a Learning Centre and filled in the communication audit, which enabled us to review our current provision and identify priorities to make a communication commitment. This then formed part of our Learning Centre Development Plan, which meant it could be embedded across the whole Learning Centre.

With a wide variety of both ages and need types we needed to be able to implement whole Learning Centre strategies, as well as be able to tailor strategies to specific learners with different needs, aged from KS1-5. As all learners have a statement of special educational needs or Education, Health and Care Plan, many learners have learning and language levels beneath age related expectations.

Learning Facilitators work with their classes for the majority of the week, and therefore were identified as key staff to have training in order to be able to develop communication friendly strategies. Training took place over a selection of twilights focusing on levels of understanding and questioning. Learning Facilitators then assessed all learners using questions based on Marion Blank's research on concrete to abstract questioning. This gave a picture of the pupils understanding of questions asked of them. This information will be used to develop strategies that can be used for both improving questioning in the



classroom, and in de-escalating behaviour.

Further training about understanding speech, language and communication needs took place on a whole inset day delivered by Child Speech. As part of this young people were interviewed about what staff did that helped them and what they found helpful. Understanding things from the point of view of the young people was important for staff to recognise the importance of developing language and communication skills and was used to inform the training. Knowle DGE followed this up with an internal training day delivered by the Deputy Head Teacher who is also a Language Leader, the Head of the Speech and Language Department and the Speech and Language Assistant, all of whom are passionate about developing communication across the Learning Centre! Knowle DGE has recently achieved the Majorie Boxall Quality Mark Award for its Nurture Group and two of the 6 principles of Nurture relate to Language, '*Language is a vital means of communication*' and '*All behaviour is communication*'. The internal training focussed on understanding how the importance of communication is embedded into other whole school initiatives such as Nurture.

Identifying young people needing support

Lots of learners needed to be seen who either had speech, language and communication needs on their statement/EHCP as well as some who did not have identified needs but that staff were concerned about. We arranged for the learners to be assessed by the Speech and Language Therapists from Child Speech to create individual programmes. Individual assessments often took much longer due to other needs many of the learners have, such as anxiety surrounding task completion and attention difficulties. Due to the high proportion of pupils needing interventions, we decided that it would be beneficial to have resources available that would meet the needs of a range of learners that would be easy to hand and could be embedded into classes, making it easy for the staff and benefitting as many pupils as possible! After the Speech and Language Therapists had assessed pupils and identified common areas to develop, our Speech and Language Assistant created 'resource' boxes of age appropriate activities and games tailored towards supporting language development areas in each class. These resources are available for staff to use with young people within lessons and will be a continually developing resource to meet the needs of learners in each class. Vocabulary was identified as a key area for development across the Learning Centre and therefore training staff on the teaching of vocabulary has also been a priority.

It was important to get parents on board with strategies we were using within the Learning Centre and decided that a positive way to engage parents was through informal coffee mornings where the Speech and Language Therapists from Child Speech could be available to talk about communication needs.

Embedding communication

The resource boxes are available to all classes to support learners at a range of different levels. We believe it's important that interventions are not something that a learner is on the receiving end of, outside the classroom, and that by continually improving our practice and quality first teaching we can embed the interventions needed into our lessons, improving provisions and outcomes for all. Introducing whole school systems such as the BLANKS questioning, the seven second think time rule, are supplemented by on-going



staff training. Some of our learners would find direct therapy difficult, and therefore it was vital that communication was enhanced through strategies within the classrooms. We have an on-going speech and language action plan which keeps communication at the forefront of our developments as a Learning Centre.

As well as assessing individual young people, we thought it was imperative that teachers had the opportunity to improve their practice in communication friendly ways, and therefore the therapists from Child Speech undertook a rolling programme of informally observing classes and giving feedback to staff of practical strategies that may support the learners in their class both individually and on a whole class level. This enabled teachers to be able to embed strategies specific to their pupils and also to identify strategies that are important across the whole Learning Centre such as using more visuals and simplifying and reducing language. Staff have had training on using social stories, and have also created visual ways of recording incidents. Some classes have also been using start/finish boxes and now/next approaches.

Evidence based interventions

Primary Talk Boost was trialled with two groups, using two different levels of progression tools. We were unsure how successful the interventions would be as they are not specifically aimed at young people with SEN/D. The interventions ran over a 10 week period and results indicated that the young people made progress in all areas: understanding spoken language, understanding and using vocabulary, sentences, storytelling and narrative and social interaction. Many of the young people progressed well through the 'targeted support' area and some even moved out of 'targeted support' and into 'Universal good practice needed'. Point progression ranged from an increase in 4 points to an increase in 26 points. As a Learning Centre we are now embedding Talk Boost in all our Primary classes as well as in our Primary and Secondary classes in our speech and language department to run as part of our Learning Centre day, rather than purely as an intervention

