Communication and Interaction Team

Supporting Speech, Language & Communication Needs (SLCN) in the Primary School

Effective communication requires secure skills across all areas of speech, language and communication. The processes involved in communication are complex and interlinked. Difficulty with any of these skills can cause a breakdown in communication which can impact on learning, developing literacy skills, friendships and wellbeing.

SLCN represents the largest area of special educational need and disability (SEND) for primary school pupils and affects about 10% of all pupils. Some children have persisting difficulties understanding or using spoken language and may be diagnosed with Developmental Language Disorder (DLD). We know that, on average, two children in every classroom have DLD. Supporting communication doesn't take lots of thought or planning. The following strategies will help develop and support the skills of *all* children in the primary classroom.

Top 10 Strategies to support

- **Plan for talk:** Ensure regular opportunities to engage in structured conversations with teachers and other adults; include this within lesson planning. Support children to work in small groups, using visual prompts or role cards as needed. This can be structured in a range of ways depending on the context. Provide positive feedback about group work skills as well as content. Teach higher level pragmatic/social skills such as staying on topic, conversation skills, compromise and negotiation.

- **Create the right environment:** Displays should be clearly defined with borders/boundaries. Keep classrooms clutter free to support attention; avoid hanging items from the ceiling, covering windows etc. Consider the acoustic properties of the room, e.g. the use of soft furnishings, carpets, hessian on display boards. Background noise levels should be managed consistently with children and adults able to hear one another with ease.

Create cosy spaces within the learning environment which encourage children to talk - ensure they are available across all key stages.

- **Adult use of language:** Notice the level of complexity of the language used by adults in the classroom. Adding a lot of unnecessary filler words and phrases, or interspersing instructions to the class with 'thinking aloud' type information ("Mrs Clarke, don't let me forget to get out the new rulers") can make it hard for pupils with SLCN to identify the key messages. A barrage of language containing lots of unfamiliar vocabulary may cause them to switch off. What is the balance between adult and child talk within the classroom across the school day?

- **Give time:** Pupils with SLCN need time to think about and process what has been said. The recommended waiting time is 7-10 seconds. Encourage hands-down thinking time during whole-class input. Consider your own pace of delivery, particularly if you are naturally a fast talker. Conversations are fast-moving, and this can impact on pupils' ability to make and maintain successful relationships with their peers, and to participate in partner talk. Time with an adult to practice responses and talk through ideas prior to partner work can help.

- **Repetition, repetition, repetition:** Pupils with SLCN may need to be exposed to new words many times before they are able to understand and use them themselves. Once a new word has been introduced, create additional opportunities for them to be revisited in a variety of contexts. There are lots of ideas on Word Aware and Language Builders for activities to practice new words

including having a working word wall. If children have not understood, despite being given thinking time, repeat what you have said once using the same words again, before you rephrase in simpler language.

- **Teach communication skills:** Don't assume children know what good listening is. Explicitly teach the rules using signs and symbols. Encourage an "asking friendly" classroom by praising children who say "I don't understand". Develop pupil confidence in asking for clarification, through prompts and set phrases. Model good communication skills and promote curiosity around words.

- **Pre-teach vocabulary:** Pre-teaching vocabulary can have a big impact on the ability of pupils with SLCN to participate actively in lessons. When exploring new words, it is important to teach aspects of sound (first sound, number of syllables, rhyming words etc.)and meaning, such as function, category, location and. When selecting vocabulary for pre-teaching, include words from all three tiers, being mindful of the importance of tier two cross-curricular words. The pupil with SLCN may need explicit pre-teaching of some tier one words. Use visual ways of exploring new words such as word maps.

- **Use visuals to support understanding:** Visuals such as objects, pictures, photos and bullet points on the board deployed during adult-led verbal input can help pupils who have comprehension difficulties by:
  - ➢ Supporting auditory memory skills
  - ➢ Aiding focus and engagement
  - ➢ Providing additional clues to help them to work out what the verbal information being given means

Visuals are typically used more routinely in early-years teaching, but they continue to be essential tools for supporting inclusion for pupils with persistent SLCN throughout the key stages.

- **Support independence:** Agree a consistent whole school approach to labelling resources with photos/symbols/words. Ensure literacy access strategies are available and accessible and that their use is specifically taught, e.g. phoneme cards, vocabulary banks and HFWs etc. Have a range of resources available to support memory and sentence creation, e.g. talking tins, mini whiteboards, colourful semantic prompts etc. Model the use of task planners to boost organisation and task completion. Visual timetables should be in place and referenced throughout the day to support understanding, organisation, memory, structure of lesson, daily routines etc.

- **Work with parents/carers**: To ensure consistency at home and school, work closely with families. Explain what you do in school and why, inviting parents into the classroom to share learning. Send home new topic vocabulary so it can be reinforced, sharing strategies and ideas to support. Encourage parents to read to their children in order to develop a love of reading and an opportunity to discuss new words.

Useful resources, links and further reading:
Websites:

Children and Family Health Devon - https://childrenandfamilyhealthdevon.nhs.uk/speech-language-therapy/articles/school-age-therapies-toolkit/

Word Aware by Stephen Parsons and Anna Branagan https://www.routledge.com/Word-Aware-Teaching-vocabulary-across-the-day-across-the-curriculum/Parsons-Branagan/p/book/9780863889554

Language Builders Chapter 6 *Promoting Vocabulary Development* www.elklan.co.uk

Time to Talk by Jean Gross Chapter 6 *Teaching Talk* *https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/9781315271965*

Futurelearn courses are currently available free on pre-teaching and teaching vocabulary https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/active-participation-through-preteaching https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/developing-vocabulary