



Communication and Interaction Team

Supporting young people with Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) in Secondary schools

Speech, language and Communication needs (SLCN) in adolescents

Communication is the most fundamental life skill for young people. It directly impacts on a person's ability to learn, develop friendships and influences their life chances. It is crucial not to underestimate the importance of communication skills on the outcomes.

- More than 10% of children and young people have long-term SLCN which create barriers to communication or learning in everyday life¹ these difficulties may present differently, but do not go away when pupils transition from primary to secondary education
- Only 20.3% of pupils with SLCN gained grade 4/C or above in English and maths at GCSE, compared with 63.9% of all pupils²
- Children living in areas of social disadvantage are at much higher risk, with upward of 50% of children starting school with delayed language and other identified SLCN³



instructions, access the curriculum, manage their behaviour and reach attainment levels that could otherwise be within their grasp. It is vital that we support and guide their communication to avoid the negative consequences.

- Lower academic achievement
- Risk of developing SEMH needs
- Social isolation
- School exclusion
- Employment and criminality

Potential challenges at Secondary

- Increased vocabulary demands
- Meaning of words change according to the subject
- Generalising the meanings of words
- Literacy becomes major source of language development
- Making links between subject areas
- Different teacher styles
- Managing less structured social 'free' time
- Increased social language demands



Language development in adolescence

Language development doesn't stop in the early years and primary school. In fact certain aspects of language develop during the secondary school years:

- Complex verbal reasoning
- Multiple meaning and abstract vocabulary
- Understanding and using figurative language
- Telling more involved narratives
- Increasingly sophisticated social communication skills

A pupil's confidence with the above higher language skills will strongly influence school attainment.

Implications for young people with SLCN

Speech, language and communication underpin the basic skills of English and Maths and are necessary for students to understand and achieve in all subjects. Without this support, they will struggle to understand

Identification

Identification in secondary can be challenging:

- A young person is more likely to hide their difficulties
- SLCN can be mistaken for behavioural difficulties
- Underlying SLCN can be masked by good surface language skills

Strategies to support secondary pupils with SLCN

With communication identified as being crucial in adolescence and knowing the potential risks associated with SLCN – it is essential to have a focus on communication within secondary schools to enable good support for those with SLCN.



Communication friendly school

The whole school approach is seen as essential in establishing a change in how schools think about communication difficulties 4. Ensuring communication is embedded at a universal level is necessary for supporting SLCN.

Key strategies

- Whole school audit, identifying good practice and areas for improvement
- School environment that support communication; raising staff awareness of the importance of language and communication, developing their skills and adapting their language
- Identification; staff to feel confident when identifying SLCN to enable the correct support

Understanding young people's SLCN

Pupils with SLCN have varied profiles and so the impact on their learning and behaviour also varies. Their profile of strengths and areas of need will be different, therefore it is important to take this into account when supporting the individual.

Key strategies

- Communication passports; Involve young people in developing their personal learning profile based on their strengths and needs
<https://www.communicationpassports.org.uk/creating-passports/>
- Supporting staff's knowledge and understanding of different types of SLCN and strategies to support.

- Staff ensure all lessons are SLCN friendly through careful planning of vocabulary, differentiation and specific SLCN supports
- Quiet space is available for regulation or individual study
- Mentoring support and check ins, to encourage pupil voice, develop awareness and reflection
- Targeted and specialist intervention delivered by trained staff to teach specific language skills
- Systems to support social communication and interaction such as interventions, different lunch times and lunch clubs.

Useful resources, links and further reading:

Websites:

ICAN primary and secondary schools teacher support - <https://ican.org.uk/i-cans-talking-point/professionals/primary-and-secondary-school-teachers/>

Communication trust- www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk

Resources:

Tips for communication supportive secondary school <https://ican.org.uk/media/1316/tips-for-a-communication-supportive-secondary-school.pdf>

Understanding links between communication and behavior factsheet <https://www.rcslt.org/-/media/Project/RCSLT/rcslt-behaviour-a4-factsheet.pdf>

References:

1) Bercow (2018) 2) Department for Education GCSE results (2017) 3) Law, J., McBean, K and Rush, R. (2011) 4) The Communication Trust, Every Child Understood www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk