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By Rosalind Pow and Emma Jordan

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Supporting Children with Speech, Language and Communication Needs in Early Years

CHILDREN’S SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPY SERVICE

The ability to communicate is an essential life skill for all children and young people and it underpins a child’s social, emotional and educational development. Strong language and communication skills are linked to better outcomes for children and young people in school and beyond.

10% of all children have long term or persistent speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) – the most prevalent special educational need identified by primary schools. In Worcestershire this figure is equivalent to 12,000 children and young people aged 0-19 years, with over 6,000 children and young people known to the Speech and Language Therapy Service. Some early years settings in areas of Worcestershire have identified 50% or more children at risk of delayed speech and language skills. The need in Worcestershire is undoubtedly substantial.

Since 2011 Worcestershire has adopted The Balanced System® framework as it offers a practical solution to meeting the needs of children and young people with SLCN. It helps us to ensure children’s needs are met by the most appropriate person in the most appropriate environment.

The Children’s Speech and Language Therapy Service is jointly commissioned by the NHS and Local Authority to deliver services at a universal, targeted and specialist level to preschool children, working in partnership with the wider workforce to meet children’s needs. Additional services from direct therapy to whole setting training and everything in between are available to be commissioned by early years settings to enhance the core service.

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1 The Communication Trust (2012) The Communication Commitment www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/commitment
The core jointly commissioned Speech and Language Therapy Service includes:

- A named therapist service to all Children’s Centres; specialist therapists may become involved with highly complex cases or with multi-agency specialist assessments carried out by the Child Development Centres. Named therapists are supported in their role by Speech and Language Therapy Assistants.

- Regular Talking Walk-In sessions in Children’s Centres where children referred to the service are seen for assessment, review and advice and where any parent can drop in for immediate support.

- Delivery of targeted interventions for those children known to the service across a range of core speech, language and communication skills, including support for practitioners in early years settings.

- Support and modelling of targeted and specialist level interventions.

- Working within the multi-disciplinary team, liaison with both health and education professionals.

- A workforce development programme which includes the Every Child a Talker programme and training for Children Centre staff and Health Visitors.

- Allocated speech and language therapy within specialist early years settings such as Child Development Centres, Nursery Language Classes and Nursery Assessment Classes.
Supporting Children with Speech, Language and Communication Needs in Early Years

The following definitions are taken from the Balanced System® and Worcestershire’s SLCN Service Redesign and supported by the new SEND Code of Practice (2014):

**UNIVERSAL**

Universal interventions support the whole population, i.e. whole setting and ensure all children have appropriate language and communication opportunities. This level includes:

- Use of appropriate information and guidance, i.e. Worcestershire’s online Speech, Language and Communication Needs Pathway
- Creating communication and language friendly environments
- Training the workforce
- Early identification of SLCN, for example using identification tools or specific programmes such as Every Child a Talker or the Ages and Stages development check.
- Use of a range of whole setting intervention approaches, for example providing consistent visual support or using adult-child interaction strategies to develop language skills

**TARGETED**

Targeted interventions offer specific support for those children and young people who are felt to be vulnerable in relation to speech, language and communication. The group is wide ranging and includes children with delayed language and communication skills who following targeted intervention will return to the universal tier, through to identification of children who may go on to have more persistent needs. This level includes:

- Use of appropriate information and guidance
- Easy access drop in sessions (Talking Walk-Ins) in all Children Centre areas which allows for early identification of those children requiring targeted and/or specialist support.
- A programme of identified, evidence based targeted interventions across a range of core speech, language and communication skills, for example attention and listening groups, speech sound groups, language groups.
- Early years practitioners who have the necessary competences and confidence to deliver a range of small group targeted interventions with support from the speech and language therapy service.

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SPECIALIST

Specialist support is in addition to the universal and targeted offer for those children and young people who require a highly individualised and personalised programme of work. This group includes children with complex learning and communication needs and those children who are cognitively able and have specific speech, language or communication needs. This level includes:

- Use of appropriate information and guidance
- Ensuring environments are adapted and accessible
- Multi-agency assessment to identify persistent and complex SLCN for example significant developmental delays and autistic spectrum disorder
- Specialist support for settings to facilitate the effective implementation of specialist interventions
- Support provided within specialist language class provision

SLCN WORKFORCE COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK

The national Speech, Language and Communication Framework (SLCF)\(^6\) is used in Worcestershire. It provides a clear and detailed framework of the skills and knowledge in speech, language and communication which are important for everyone who works with children and young people. It is available as an interactive online tool and in booklet format. The SLCF provides competences at four stages – universal, enhanced, specialist and extension. All training courses offered by the Speech and Language Therapy Service are mapped onto the SLCF and form part of the Workforce Development Plan for SLCN in Worcestershire.

Supporting Children with Speech, Language and Communication Needs in Early Years

ADDITIONAL SERVICES AVAILABLE FOR SETTINGS TO COMMISSION LOCALLY

We are the main NHS and Local Authority service provider in Worcestershire. We have a proven track record of improving outcomes for children and young people experiencing speech, language and communication needs in early years settings. We can offer practical solutions to the challenges faced by early years practitioners.

We aim to provide one solution to settings to support their provision for children with SLCN at each level - universal, targeted and specialist. What every setting needs to know about us:

You can buy additional speech and language therapy from us – from direct therapy to whole setting training and everything in between

Because we’re part of the NHS, our costs are highly competitive starting at just £55 per hour for a fully qualified therapist

We will only sell what you need – public funds are limited so we aim to provide services that are sustainable, efficient and value for money

Your therapist is supported by the experience and expertise of a team of more than 60 therapists, assistants and specialist teachers

Buying from us is hassle free - all of our therapists are RCSLT and HCPC registered, DBS checked, fully trained, supervised and working within safe to practice clinical guidelines. We take full clinical accountability for all of our staff so you don’t have to.
**ADDITIONAL SERVICES - UNIVERSAL, TARGETED AND SPECIALIST INTERVENTIONS AND APPROACHES**

Examples of approaches and interventions available for settings to commission:

- **SPECIALIST LEVEL TRAINING**
- **REGULAR DIRECT THERAPY**
- **MORE TIME IN SETTINGS FOR ASSESSMENTS, REVIEWS AND TARGET SETTING**
- **SUPPORTING THE DELIVERY OF TARGETED INTERVENTIONS**
- **TALKING MATTERS TRAINING**
- **EVERY CHILD A TALKER**  
  0-5 year olds
- **LANGUAGE FOR LEARNING TRAINING**
Every Child a Talker

As a setting you need to join the ECaT programme if:

- You have high numbers of children with speech, language and communication delay
- Achieving a ‘good level of development’ is being affected by children’s underlying speech and language delay
- You are looking for an outcome based intervention programme linked to pupil premium
- You have identified communication skills as a priority or focus for development over a year
- You are developing your offer for children with SLCN to meet Ofsted requirements

The ECaT programme has been designed to improve the skills and expertise of the early years workforce in early language development, and it aims to raise children’s achievement in early language as measured against the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile. 15 nursery settings are funded for the ECaT programme each year, however the programme is available for settings to commission themselves.

The ECaT programme is one year long and includes:

- Settings identifying a member of staff to take on the role of the Early Language Lead Practitioner (ELLP)
- 2 full days of Language for Learning Foundation Stage training
- 3 half day cluster meetings to explore knowledge, share skills and expertise
- In setting support – the ECaT team visit regularly throughout the duration of the programme to support the setting in implementing their action plan.
- ELLPs collect data at the start and end of the programme about the children’s level of language functioning in order to plan for development.

ECaT has shown positive outcomes on children’s language development and practitioner knowledge and confidence. Practitioners develop competences at an enhanced level of the Speech, Language and Communication Framework (SLCF). Over 150 settings have completed the programme. Year end reassessments have demonstrated significant reductions in the number of children at risk of language delay following ECaT support, typically numbers are halved.

The ECaT programme is free to 15 settings each year or can be commissioned at a cost of £1,500 per setting

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO JOIN THE PROGRAMME CONTACT: Rosalind Pow, ECaT Programme Manager on 01562 752749 or rosalind.pow@nhs.net
Language for Learning® training and resources

Language for Learning is a non-profit making project providing training and resources to support those working with children and young people with SLCN.

Language for Learning provides:

- A range of training opportunities in Worcestershire each year together with options for whole setting training
- Training from Foundation Stage through to Key Stages 3 & 4
- A range of options for training delivery, from half days to six session modular courses
- An extensive range of resources to support children and young people at a universal, whole class level

Developing competences at an enhanced level, the training:

- Increases shared knowledge and understanding of SLCN
- Equips practitioners to recognise and identify children and young people experiencing SLCN
- Increases awareness of the impact of SLCN on academic, social and emotional development
- Supports practitioners in creating language learning opportunities across the day
- Empowers practitioners to use a range of strategies to support children and young people with SLCN

Language for Learning training starts at £25 per person for a half day course. Setting based training is also available.

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO BOOK SOME TRAINING CONTACT: Elaine Packwood at Language for Learning on 01562 751866 or visit www.languageforlearning.co.uk

Don’t miss our ‘Introduction to SLCN for Early Years Practitioners’ – this half day course is an essential introduction for everyone working in early years settings and costs just £25 per person
**An Introduction to Speech, Language and Communication Needs**

An essential introduction to speech, language and communication skills, designed for everyone working in early years settings.

The half day sessions includes:

- The Language for Learning ‘Model of Speech, Language and Communication’
- Typical language development
- Tools to help you recognise young children with SLCN
- Key strategies to support young children in their development
- Competences at a universal and enhanced level of the Speech, Language and Communication Framework

Delivered by registered Language for Learning trainers (an experienced speech and language therapist and specialist teacher)

Check online for dates: [www.languageforlearning.co.uk/courses](http://www.languageforlearning.co.uk/courses)

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**Foundation Stage Two Day Course**

This two day course is designed for anyone working in early years settings who needs to develop their knowledge and skills in supporting children’s speech, language and communication skills. This comprehensive training builds on the half day course ‘An Introduction to Speech, Language and Communication Needs’ above.

The course includes:

- The Language for Learning ‘Model of Speech, Language and Communication’
- Typical language development and identification tools to help you recognise young children with SLCN.
- An extensive range of practical strategies to support young children in their development.
- Exploration of specific language and communication skills, including processing information/instructions, understanding language, vocabulary skills, expressive language and adult child interaction.
- Competences at a universal and enhanced level of the Speech, Language and Communication Framework

Delivered by registered Language for Learning trainers (an experienced speech and language therapist and specialist teacher)

Check online for dates: [www.languageforlearning.co.uk/courses](http://www.languageforlearning.co.uk/courses)
Word Aware 2: Teaching Vocabulary in the Early Years

There is overwhelming evidence that limited vocabulary skills affect academic achievement. A lack of vocabulary is a key component underlying failure for many children especially those who are economically disadvantaged. There is also evidence that children’s spoken vocabulary at the end of first grade is a significant prediction of reading comprehension 10 years later. A child’s early years are key to making a difference, providing a good foundation of vocabulary learning.

The Word Aware approach consists of four parts:

**Make words count**
Promote language in general and expose children to a rich and wide, but appropriately demanding vocabulary.

**Teaching vocabulary**
This uses the STAR approach:
- **Select** the really useful vocabulary that is from the topic or stories. There are also specific concepts to work on.
- **Teach** the selected vocabulary in a structured engaging manner.
- **Activate** the meaning by using the words in context, linking the word to the children’s existing knowledge.
- **Review** the taught words to ensure they are retained.

**Word detective**
- Teaching simple strategies to enhance children’s independent word learning by creating an environment where children can talk about words they don’t know.

**Fun with words**
- Enjoy, celebrate and reinforce vocabulary by playing word games that all children can access.

**Involving Families**
- Engage with families to develop vocabulary by working together.

The approach gives fun, hands on practical activities to engage all learners.

The start-up package is 5 visits of 2 hours to include a combination of training, demonstration and discussion.

This package costs £750

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Anna Branagan on 01562 752749 or anna.branagan@nhs.net
Setting Up Small Group Targeted Interventions

**Narrative Skills**

Black Sheep Press publish a range of narrative programmes that use a colour coded, symbol supported framework for structuring a narrative. This develops in complexity with age. The resources include a range of well-illustrated colourful pictures to teach the elements of a story. The programmes help to improve vocabulary, sentence structure and listening skills.

The narrative programmes report significant improvements in the quality of children’s verbal storytelling. There are separate programmes for Nursery and Reception. The programmes are designed to be run as small group targeted interventions with support at a whole group level.

Narrative can be implemented over a term and is supported by a speech and language therapist and speech and language therapy assistant. Implementation includes:

- Twilight training session for staff on developing narrative skills at a whole setting level, facilitating narrative skills in small groups and generalising skills learnt back in the whole group setting
- Training session for all practitioners delivering the programme and those who are supporting them
- Demonstration and co-delivery of groups – the therapist or assistant visit the setting on a weekly basis for up to four weeks gradually handing over delivery to the early years practitioners at the end of this period; up to two groups can be co-delivered each week.
- A follow up session at the end of term to support staff in on-going delivery of the group and support implementing ideas at a whole setting level

Implementing narrative over a term costs £1,200 excluding the cost of any commercial materials required

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Anna Branagan on 01562 752749 or anna.branagan@nhs.net
Talking Matters Workshops

Talking Matters Workshops provide practical training in delivering targeted and specialist level interventions for children with SLCN. Included in each workshop is a resource pack with evidence-based activities and strategies for you to take away and use with the children you work with in nursery. All workshops are delivered by speech and language therapists.

A range of workshops are available including:

- Early Years Listening
- Early Years Understanding
- Early Years Speech

**Talking Matters workshops training starts at £50 per person for a half day course. Setting based training is also available.**

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO BOOK SOME TRAINING CONTACT: Tracy Mead on 01527 488326 or tracymead1@nhs.net

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**Early Years Listening**

An Early Years workshop which is based on the ‘Teaching Children to Listen’ approach. The workshop includes how to teach children the four rules of good listening and to understand why they are important.

The half day sessions includes:

- The four rules of good listening
- Typical development of listening skills
- Evidence-based activities for running a listening group
- Strategies for generalising good listening into group settings.
- A resource pack to support group work
- Competences at a universal and enhanced level of the Speech, Language and Communication Framework

*Delivered by experienced speech and language therapists*

£50 per person
Early Years Understanding
This workshop explains the different points of breakdown that can affect understanding, and shares practical activities for running small group targeted intervention.

The half day sessions includes:

- The typical development of understanding
- Information carrying words and how to use them
- A structure for group work
- Strategies for supporting children in group settings
- A resource pack to support group work
- Competences at a universal and enhanced level of the Speech, Language and Communication Framework

Delivered by experienced speech and language therapists

£50 per person

Early Years Speech
A workshop that explains the different stages of breakdown that can cause speech difficulties, and shares practical evidence based activities for delivering small group targeted intervention.

The half day sessions includes:

- The typical development of speech
- Practical activities for developing speech skills
- A structure for group work
- A resource pack to support group work
- Competences at a universal and enhanced level of the Speech, Language and Communication Framework

Delivered by experienced speech and language therapists

£50 per person
Training at a Specialist Level

Specialist level training is available from the service covering topics such as:

- Supporting children and young people with complex needs in early years settings
- Specific speech and language disorders

Training at this level is typically tailor made and may be provided as outreach from a specialist provision such as a specialist language class or special school.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Emma Jordan on 01562 752749 or emma.jordan@nhs.net

Signalong

Worcestershire is a Signalong county. Signalong is a sign support system based on British Sign Language. It empowers children and adults with impaired communication to understand and express their needs, choices and desires by providing sign vocabulary for life and learning. Signalong can be used at a universal level in schools to support children’s understanding of language. Signalong training is available from the service or from Language for Learning.

Signalong training starts at £60 per person for an introductory half day course. School based training is also available.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Elaine Packwood on 01562 752749 or elaine.packwood@nhs.net

Regular Direct Intervention/Therapy

The core commissioned service has limited capacity to deliver regular direct intervention for children in early years settings. For those children with specific speech and/or language disorder where direct intervention with a therapist is recommended settings and the Local Authority can commission this level of input at a rate of £55 per hour.

Regular direct intervention costs: £55 per hour

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Emma Jordan on 01562 752749 or emma.jordan@nhs.net
The following is an extract from the Workforce Development Plan for SLCN in Worcestershire developed in line with guidance from the Commissioning Support Programme\(^7\). It identifies school staff and the level of Speech, Language and Communication Framework\(^8\) competence recommended:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IQF(^9) Level of Competence for SLCN</th>
<th>Who?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 Universal level of SLCF</td>
<td>Whole of the core children’s workforce including:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Early years practitioners</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teachers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Teaching assistants</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Support workers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Governors</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Enhanced level of SLCF</td>
<td>Children’s workforce delivering an enhanced level of service at a universal and in some cases, targeted level of support including:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Early years practitioners</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teaching assistants</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• SENCOs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Support workers</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Enhanced level of SLCF (greater experience of SLCN within wider role)</td>
<td>Children’s workforce delivering an enhanced level of service at a targeted level of support including:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Delivered targeted intervention:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Early Language Lead Practitioners (ECaT)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Named TA for SLCN in mainstream schools</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Teachers and teaching assistants in specialist provision</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Staff who have developed a special interest in SLCN:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Teachers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• SENCOs</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 Specialist level of SLCF</td>
<td>Specialist teachers in charge of specialist resources for SLCN</td>
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</tbody>
</table>


\(^9\) IQF – Children’s Workforce Development Council’s Integrated Qualification Framework
The Speech and Language Therapy Service is a county wide service organised in three locality teams. Please contact us for further information:

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