Guide to Universal Provision

What is Universal Provision for SLCN?

Universal support is intended for all children, not just children with additional needs. For SLCN, the focus may be on improving the language learning environment and/or supporting parents and families to ensure that general strategies are in use which help all children's communication to develop. The support may include focused training or staff development to ensure all professionals working with children have 'universal' knowledge about SLCN as defined by the Speech, Language and Communication Framework.

Most children with speech, language and communication needs will make good progress and have their needs met with the support that can be offered at universal level.

Early intervention, as soon as a need is identified, will help to prevent further problems. Use of guidance materials such as those found in the IDP (see section 3.3) and "*Language for Learning in the Primary School"* (Hayden and Jordan 2015) *and Language for Learning in the Secondary School"* (Hayden and Jordan 2012) will also help.

Every school in Worcestershire was given a copy of the first edition of Language for Learning in the primary school in 2008 and this should be consulted when schools are considering SLCN provision.
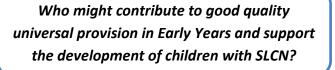
Examples of universal level approaches and services in Worcestershire:

- Language Link

- Every Child a Talker (ECAT) in Early Years settings

- Whole school projects supported by specialist services

- 2½ year check by Health visitors

- Access to Speech and Language Therapy in Children's Centres

- 'Show me' DVD (www.languageforlearning.co.uk)

- Whole-school training from specialist services

Universal Provision in Early Years

Who might contribute to good quality universal provision in Early Years and support the development of children with SLCN?

- Parents

- Families

- Friends

- Child minders

- Health professionals (e.g. GPs, Midwives, Health Visitors)

- Early Years practitioners and advisors

- YR staff in schools

- Librarians

- Family Support workers

- Children's Centres staff

What helps?

There are some simple strategies which help everyone working with young children to be good conversational partners on the following page.

General suggestions for supporting children in early years settings

We can be good conversational partners

How ?

Getting the child's attention first

By getting down to their level and saying their name – this encourages them to stop and listen

This will show them that we're valuing what they say, and will encourage them to keep talking

Repeating back the child's words and sentences

Using simple repetitive language, keeping your sentences short

Talking about our everyday activities as we do them, saying things more than once helps children join in and pick up new words

Making learning new vocabulary fun and memorable by using all the senses

If a child makes an error in a word or sentence, we should simply say the correct version rather than pointing out the mistake

If we're teaching the names of fruits, encourage the child to feel and smell the fruits as they learn the words. We can use familiar songs/rhymes as a learning tool by missing out words

Building on what the child says, adding one or two more words

Praising the child's efforts, even if the results are not perfect

For example, if the child says "look car", we could say "look, a red car". By doing this we are signallying that we've heard what they have said and are modelling the next stage of language development

Using the full range of expression

Speaking in a lively, animated voice; using gestures and facial expressions. This will give more clues about what our words mean, which is useful if the child is struggling to understand language.

Trying not to ask too many questions, especially ones that sound like we're constantly testing the child; they can block the flow of natural conversation. The best questions are those that challenge the child to think rather than give a yes/no answer.

Being careful with questions

Making language learning fun

Playing around with words, sounds and sentences. Talking in funny voices, having daft conversations. Experimenting with language is a vital part of learning; the more children see you experimenting with language, the more likely they are to have a go themselves.

From 'Learning to Talk, Talking to Learn' DVD (ICAN www.ican.org.uk). From 2007, in all Early Years settings in Worcestershire

For more information and a wealth of practical ideas to support children's speech, language and communication development in Early Years, refer to:

- Worcestershire Toolkit: Communication, Language & Literacy (available in all Early Years settings in Worcestershire)
- Talk to Your Baby www.literacytrust.org.uk/talktoyourbaby
- Chatter Matters www.ican.org.uk
- SIREN films: Email info@sirenfilms.co.uk Website www.sirenfilms.co.uk

Refer to Worcestershire Primary Care Trust and Worcestershire County Council (2010) *"Developing every child's speech, language and communication in Early Years Settings"* for strategies, suggestions and resource ideas to inform good practice in the development of speech, language and communication skills. It is designed for all professionals who have a role in supporting children in Early Years settings and includes messages that can be shared with parents as well.

Embracing the principles of the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework (EYFS)

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Framework sets out the statutory requirements and practice guidance for providing high quality learning, development and welfare for children from birth until the August after their fifth birthday. The Framework is based on principles that:

- recognise each child as a unique and competent learner;
- emphasise the importance of providing positive relationships;
- promote a rich enabling environment and
- emphasise the importance of a play-based approach to supporting learning and development.

In order to progress to become competent readers and writers, children need to have developed good speech, language and communication skills. They need to be able to understand language, as well as develop the skills to use language to express themselves. Children need to have a well-developed vocabulary, with a real depth of understanding of the meanings of words.

The EYFS recommends that from birth onwards children should be helped to develop:

- language for communication;
- language for thinking;
- linking of sounds and letters;
- reading;
- writing.

Schools and settings should develop their own strategy for the development of speech, language and communication, in line with the EYFS guidance, and this strategy should be shared with parents. It should describe how the setting will support all children's communication development, as well as how it will identify and support children with SLCN. Leaders and managers should ensure that the strategy is implemented, and should lead their teams to constantly reflect on and review their practice.

Every Child a Talker (ECaT)

ECAT is a programme of training and support on language development and intervention to those working in Early Years at a universal level. The aims of ECAT are to raise children's achievement in early language; raise practitioners' skills and knowledge and to increase parental understanding and involvement in children's language development. Worcestershire has been offering ECaT to early years settings since 2009, demonstrating a significant impact on the numbers of children at risk of SLCN. Visit the Language for Learning website for more information: www.languageforlearning.co.uk/courses

Universal Provision in School

Universal provision in school starts with Quality First Teaching

Inclusive teaching:

- is set within a culture of high expectations for all
- emphasises what a child will learn rather than the activities they will do
- is based on an assessment of what the children already know, can do and understand
- uses teaching styles that meet the needs of individuals and groups so that all children are engaged in learning
- establishes access strategies that will help overcome the potential barriers to learning

> *The importance of inclusive, classroom-based, early intervention cannot be underestimated*

Communication Friendly Environments

Good universal provision starts with adjusting the environment to reduce or remove barriers to enable all learners to develop their social, emotional and learning potential. Consideration must be given to the way in which adults interact and communicate with children; the physical environment; visual support and careful planning. Effective strategies for supporting children should be known by all staff, including lunch-time supervisors and office staff and there should be a consistency of approach across the whole setting/school to avoid confusion for the child.

> *A learning environment that supports language and communication has a wide range of benefits for everyone!*

> *What would you expect to see in a communication-friendly environment?*

Within the SLCN Pathway there are two 'Communication-friendly Environment' audit tools – one designed for Early Years Settings (download 7.2) and the other for Schools (download 7.3). Each audit tool describes features and strategies that will support *all* children and particularly those with SLCN. The audit tools can be used either by individuals as an evaluation of their own inclusive practice or by Senior Management as part of focused observations.

The 'Summary of Communication-friendly Environment Audit' at the end of each audit provides an opportunity to record what is being done already, what might be done next and any outcomes.

For further practical suggestions for developing a communication-friendly environment and supporting children with SLCN refer to: the **Language for Learning** primary and secondary books
www.languageforlearning.co.uk

How Acoustically-Friendly is your Listening Environment?

Language development starts early in life and literacy skills are directly related to auditory development. Children may spend up to 45% of their time in classrooms in active listening situations. Improved listening conditions help children to become better readers, aid understanding and improve their literacy and social skills. We need to make speech clearer for children - not necessarily louder.

Factors influencing good listening

Distance between the children and the speaker. The closer the listener and the talker are, the louder their voice will be. Varying distances makes it difficult to hear consistently well.

Noise within the room – children chattering, scraping chairs, noisy heaters & pipes, projectors, household appliances (washing machines, driers etc), fish tanks. ,
Outside noise – from neighbouring classrooms & corridors, traffic noise, gyms, toilets flushing and hand drier noise. Noise will affect the child's ability to hear speech clearly. Children need the speakers' voice to be at least 16dB louder than any competing background noise for good listening.

Reverberation / echo sound reflects off hard surfaces such as walls, floors, ceilings, glass & desks – this can interfere with speech by masking or distorting important speech sounds.

Children need a much quieter listening environment than adults to hear clearly. Their auditory neural pathways do not mature fully until about the age of 15 so they find it difficult to predict and fill in gaps as adults do. Their experience of language & vocabulary is limited so they are less able to use context to guess what is being said. We must not assume that they can and understand spoken language in the same way that we do. We have a life time of listening experiences to help us – they do not.

Other factors influencing children's listening:
Hearing difficulties whether permanent, transient or fluctuating can make it difficult for children to follow speech in a room with poor acoustics. Hearing aids & Cochlear Implants amplify (make louder) all sounds not just speech. Children with poor concentration, learning difficulties, and impaired vision may also find it difficult listening in poor acoustic conditions and may give up trying altogether.

Improving your Listening Environment

Cover hard surfaces with softer absorbent materials – curtains, carpets, cushions etc.

Put felt in equipment trays, have blinds half closed not fully open. Close doors to other rooms.

Discourage shouting within the room. Actively encourage children to speak quietly at times.

Use old tennis balls cut in half to reduce noisy scraping of chair legs.

Use hearing aids effectively together with fm (Radio) systems in the classroom for those children who benefit from their use.

Use a CSFS (Classroom Soundfield System) to maximise listening for all children.

Complete the checklist (download 7.4) and make adjustments to your listening environment where negative scores are recorded, where you can.

Use of ICT

Children who are unable to communicate effectively by speech may need additional equipment to make them understood. The term "communication aids" covers a wide range of devices, from low-tech aids such as symbol charts and books, to high-tech electronic aids such as specialist devices that speak out messages at the press of a key.

When ICT is used effectively, many of the barriers to achievement and differences in learning can be reduced. ICT can be very effective in supporting the inclusion of pupils with SLCN in the mainstream classroom. It offers the opportunity to help the pupil both to access the curriculum and to enable them to demonstrate what they know, understand and can do.

There are a number of ICT options (including speech supported software) that can help to support the learning of vocabulary, planning, organisation and presentation of information. Specialist support services in Worcestershire may be able to give advice to settings and schools about computer software programmes to support children with SLCN.

An increasing number of settings and schools in Worcestershire are using **Widgit** symbol-supported software supported by local Widgit Centres. See the Widgit website at www.widgit.com for more information.

Transition

Transition can involve the move from home to pre-school, preschool to school, class to class, key stage to key stage, primary school to secondary school. There are many factors associated with these changes, including learning to cope with a new environment, new friends and different people and this can present as a challenge to many children and particularly those who have additional needs. Appropriate support, clear guidelines and close liaison between all parties involved are required to ensure a smooth transition.

There needs to be well-planned, thorough transition procedures in place which may include:

- Close liaison and planning with all professionals working with the child;
- Liaison with parents to discuss the child's needs and provision in their new setting;
- Additional preparatory visits for children, including the opportunity to meet key staff;
- Visits by staff from the receiving setting/school to observe/familiarise themselves with the child;
- Information for staff on child's needs and strategies to meet them (e.g. use of passports or information cards).

For more information and suggestions of resources to support transition at all stages, refer to:
- "Transition Toolkit: A framework for managing change and successful transition planning for children and young people with autism spectrum conditions" (Broderick and Mason-Williams, 2008)

- "The Big picture: Your Guide to Transition age 13-25" (Sholl and Dancyger, 2005)
  https://www.solihull.gov.uk/Attachments/TransitionPathwayp1.pdf

- "Moving on Up" (www.speechmark.net): a board game to help prepare pupils for making the transition to a new school

- AFASIC (www.afasic.org.uk) "Transfer to Secondary School Pack Moving on Moving Up" aims to help families and schools support children with SLCN as they transfer from primary to secondary.

- "Early Years Transition Toolkit, Making the Unfamiliar Familiar" (Worcestershire County Council) www.worcestershire.gov.uk/earlyyearsinclusion March 2011

- Ayre and Roulstone (2009) "Transition to Secondary School" has an excellent list of resources and materials, transition programmes, sources of information about SLCN, training materials, websites, etc.