

## **Speech and Language UK – Written evidence (EDU0036)**

### **Introduction**

At Speech and Language UK, we are working to help more than 1.7 million children in the UK who currently face challenges in talking and understanding words. Last year, we directly supported more than 65,000 children by designing tools and training for nurseries and schools and giving advice and guidance to families. Our two special schools help children with the most complex speech and language challenges to overcome them. Our schools teach children from Key Stage 2 to the end of Key Stage 4. We believe that speech, language and communication skills are fundamental to a child's development and ability to thrive. We want to ensure that help is given to those with lifelong speech and language challenges, but also that supporting children's spoken language skills is given greater prominence for all children, throughout their education, from early years to the end of secondary school.

Even before the pandemic our education system had problems identifying and helping children who were struggling with talking and understanding words. Since the COVID-19 lockdowns, the problem has only been exacerbated. Last year we published a report which found a growing number of children face challenges talking and understanding words – from an estimated 1.5 million in 2021 to 1.7 million in 2022 – a marked increase of 200,000<sup>1</sup>. Unfortunately we also know the impact that unaddressed speech and language needs can have on the life of a child, throughout their education and in to adulthood.

### **The impact of the 11-16 system on the motivation and confidence of pupils of all abilities**

Approximately 7.6% of all children – or two children in every average class of 30<sup>2</sup> – have a long-term difficulty with talking and understanding words called Developmental Language Disorder (DLD). That equates to one million children in the UK having DLD. They may struggle to pay attention in class, to understand and follow the teacher's instructions, to express themselves, and to join in with peers and form friendships. Some children's difficulties manifest in disruptive behaviour, while other children will mask their difficulties and go undetected.

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<sup>1</sup> [1.7 Million Futures Report](#)

<sup>2</sup> Norbury et al (2016) *The impact of nonverbal ability on prevalence and clinical presentation of language disorder: evidence from a population study*. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*

Many of these children struggle with mental health and poor self-esteem later in life. As DLD is often overlooked and there is a shortage of speech and language therapists to support diagnosis it is unclear how many children with DLD are identified/diagnosed, let alone how many are getting extra help because of their DLD. We would expect a significant proportion of children with DLD to be included as part of the SLCN group, but statistical analysis indicates that there are almost 400,000 children with DLD in the UK who are unidentified<sup>3</sup>.

We have a case study from a report we published last year that illustrates this point well. One of the young people we have worked with, Ellen, had a very difficult transition to secondary school. Her mother provided this account:

"Ellen is 18 and has Developmental Language Disorder. Transition from primary to secondary school was a real challenge. Ellen's experience was one of low expectations, a poverty of ambition and unequal access to the curriculum. Throughout secondary school, there was little accommodation for Ellen. There was no accountability or checking that Ellen's Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) was being implemented. She spent a lot of her time withdrawn from classes working solely with a Teaching Assistant (TA) with few chances for her to interact with classmates, leading to isolation in both the social and learning context. Ironically the interventions implemented to support her, excluded Ellen. She was segregated and marginalised - working away from the mainstream classroom environment. The pace of the day and the 'one size fits all timetable' did not help. Ellen was not given adequate time to process information. She was in a noisy atmosphere with time spent listening to the teachers talking at pace getting through content and copying lengthy notes, overloading her working memory causing her to zone out, so progress was limited. Lots of Ellen's tasks were undertaken by the TA, not Ellen. So Ellen went under the radar."<sup>4</sup>

But a child without DLD can still struggle with talking and understanding words, especially post lockdowns, where normal socialisation and development were impacted. We know that these problem affect all areas of a child's learning and without adequate support they will fall behind. We know for instance a child struggling with talking and understanding words is at significant risk of:

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<sup>3</sup> 4.71M children of Primary school age in England (2019 DfE figures) 7.6% = 357,960  
<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics>

<sup>4</sup> [1.7 Million Futures Report](#)

- **Worse literacy and numeracy: 6x less likely to reach expected standard in English, 11x less likely in Maths<sup>5</sup>**
- **Low GCSE grades: only 15% gain a 9-5 pass at GCSE in English and Maths<sup>6</sup>**
- **More mental health problems: 2x more likely to develop mental health difficulties in adulthood<sup>7</sup>**
- **Increased risk of offending: At least 60% of young offenders have language difficulties<sup>8</sup>**
- **Less secure employment: 2x more likely to experience unemployment as adults<sup>9</sup>**

Teachers need the proper training to help children with speech and language needs, and deliver interventions that can help those who have fallen behind while identifying those with more complex needs. We also should look at the Ofsted guidelines for assessing how schools are addressing pupils speech and language needs, with more exacting standards being introduced.

## **Conclusion**

We know there are things we can do to help students who are struggling with talking and understanding words. There are low cost interventions that can be used in mainstream settings. These can help students reach their expected standards, and identify pupils who may have more complex needs.

Training at ITT, ECF and ongoing CPD levels should therefore include:

- Use of low cost interventions
- Revise Ofsted guidelines to reflect proper standards for educational institutions in addressing children and young people's speech and language challenges
- Teaching strategies to support children with longer-term speech and language challenges, particularly Developmental Language Disorder.

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<sup>5</sup> [Save the Children Report, 2016](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Department for Education, 2022 0](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Public Health England report](#)

<sup>8</sup> Bryan, K., Garvani, G., Gregory, J. and Kilner, K., 2015. Language difficulties and criminal justice: The need for earlier identification. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders*, 50(6), pp.763-775.

[Bryan 2015.pdf](#)

<sup>9</sup> Law, J., Rush, R., Schoon, I., & Parsons, S. (2009). Modeling developmental language difficulties from school entry into adulthood: Literacy, mental health, and employment outcomes. [Law 2009.pdf](#)

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