before you picked up this article, did you know what SEN stood for? Don’t worry if not: I polled several secondary teachers before I began writing and was surprised to find that many of them hadn’t heard of the acronym.

And yet SEN is a major cause of SEN in secondary schools and prevents many pupils from accessing the curriculum and fulfilling their potential. So, before we go on, let’s define SEN.

What is SEN?

SEN stands for speech, language and communication needs. All children and young people need good speech and language: knowledge in order to access the school curriculum, make good progress and achieve good outcomes from school and from life. After all, if pupils cannot communicate effectively, they cannot interact with their peers or express their feelings. Let’s call this emotional literacy.

There are important differences between the three elements of SEN: Let’s deconstruct the acronym.

S stands for speech. Pupils need to be able to speak fluently — which is to say with a clear voice, using appropriate pitch, volume and intonation, and without too much hesitation — as an expression to themselves and demonstrate their understanding in every school subject. Being able to speak enables pupils to clearly communicate their thoughts and feelings.

L stands for language. Pupils need to command a range of appropriate vocabulary and to demonstrate understanding and to adapt their communication style in order to suit the purpose and audience. They need to be able to use language appropriately in social situations and to their social, emotional and mental health and wellbeing. After all, if pupils cannot communicate effectively, they cannot interact with their peers or express their feelings. Let’s call this emotional literacy.

C stands for communication. Pupils need to know how to adapt their communication style in order to suit the purpose and audience. They need to be able to use language fluently — which is to say with a clear voice, using appropriate pitch, volume and intonation, and without too much hesitation — as an expression to themselves and demonstrate their understanding in every school subject. Being able to speak enables pupils to clearly communicate their thoughts and feelings.

Vital for secondary schools

Language development is something generally associated with early years education. However, language and communication skills continue to develop throughout pupils’ teenage years. Pupils continue learning new vocabulary and complex language structures.

It is therefore important for secondary teachers to be able to encourage and extend this development. Put simply, language and communication between teachers and pupils enables learning.

Furthermore, pupils need the ability to use language for negotiation, compromise, resolving conflict, developing relationships and for managing and regulating their emotions. And all pupils need the skills to be proficient communicators, for school, work and for life.

However, there are many pupils who struggle to develop these skills. For some pupils this may mean specialist support is needed and/or access to alternative and augmentative means of communication such as signs, symbols and communication aids.

For others, however, tailored support from within school can make a considerable difference. Without this support, pupils with SEN will struggle to understand instructions, access the curriculum, manage their behaviour and reach targets that could otherwise be well within their grasp. It is therefore vital that secondary school teachers understand how to support pupils with SEN.

The policy context

It is 10 years since the term SEN entered the popular lexicon. In 2008, John Bercow MP chaired an independent cross-party commission into the way in which children and young people with SEN were supported. The Bercow Review identified five key themes/problems:

1. Communication is crucial to children’s life chances and yet awareness of its importance among the public and decision-makers is not sufficient.
2. Strategic wide-scale approaches to supporting SEN are rare. Very often SEN does not feature in national or local policies.
3. Communication is complex and inequitable. Too often support for children’s SEN is planned and delivered through the available resources, rather than what is needed, leading to an unacceptable level of variation across the country.
4. Support that makes a difference is based on the evidence of what works. However, service design and cuts frequently do not take account of the evidence we have.
5. Too many children with SEN are being missed and are not getting the vital support they need.

To address these five key themes, the commission set out 50 recommendations. Chief among them were the following:

Third, the commission said that communication was critical. Everyone must understand speech, language and communication better. To achieve this, clear communication on improving social mobility, health inequality and employment.

Second, a new cross-government strategy for children who initially had SEN and who changed their category of need when they transferred to secondary school were most likely to be identified as having moderate or specific learning difficulties.

The report went on to argue that “the decline in the proportion of pupils identified as having SEN as the pupil progress through secondary school needs close monitoring to ensure that . . . pupils are being properly identified in terms of their special needs is the first instance (and that) pupils who do have SEN receive adequate support as they progress through secondary school.

The report also found that, although the main problem was that many pupils were not identified as SEN, some who were identified as such were in fact pupils with English as an additional language. It said that further investigation was needed in order to determine whether there was systematic misidentification of children’s needs.

The second part of this series next week (January 17). I’ll look at how schools and teachers can identify pupils with SEN, including the common risk factors and characteristics of SEN. I will also consider how we can raise the profile of SEN in schools to better support pupils. The remainder of this series will consider pupils with SEN and how to develop effective intervention and interventions that help pupils with SEN.

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Identification of need

Department for Education (DfE) census data from January 2018 shows that the percentage of pupils with SEN increased from 14.4 per cent in 2017 to 14.6 per cent in 2018 and that the percentage of pupils with a Statement or Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) increased from 2.8 to 3.0 per cent. Of these pupils, 34.3 per cent of pupils were on SEN support in January 2018, this equates to 11.7 per cent of the total pupil population, an increase from 11.6 per cent in 2017.

The 2018 data shows that SEN remains one of the most significant areas of SEN, with 22.8 per cent of pupils with support and 14.6 per cent of pupils with a Statement or EHCP being identified as having SEN as their primary need.

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Speech, language and communication needs can be the underpinning reason for many other problems and should be on the radar of every secondary school. In a new five-part series, Matt Bromley looks at how to support SEN in key stage 3.
Speech, language and communication needs can underpin many other problems. Continuing his series, Matt Bromley looks at how secondary schools must have good systems in place for identifying pupils with SLCN.

SLCN stands for speech, language and communication needs. Speech, language and communication underpin basic literacy and are necessary for students to understand and achieve in all subjects. As such, all children and young people need good speech, language and communication skills in order to access the school curriculum, make good progress and achieve good outcomes, in school and in life.

What’s more, speech, language and communication are closely linked to behaviour, social, emotional and mental health because they influence how young people interact with their peers and how they feel about themselves.

The Impact of SLCN

Just 15 per cent of pupils with SLCN achieve the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of their primary school years (compared with 61 per cent of all children) and only 20 per cent of pupils with SLCN gain age-related levels of GCSE English and maths at GCSE (compared with 64 per cent of all pupils).

Also, children with language difficulties may appear forgetful or may take time to carry out the activity.

They may appear to stop concentrating when you are talking to them in a group. They may not be able to understand what you are saying and so switch off.

In activities that involve a lot of talking, like class discussions, they may be quiet and not join in, or they may join in but give inappropriate answers.

A pupil who is experiencing difficulties with expressive language may do some of the following:

• They may use very general words where a more specific word would be better.
• Their language may sound immature compared with other children of their age.
• They may omit the endings of words.
• They may omit the small parts of a sentence like determiners such as “the” and “a”.
• They may wrong orders the words in a sentence, and/or miss important information in a sentence.
• They may seem to be struggling to express themselves, for example they may know a word but appear not to be able to access it, resulting in lots of fillers or gesticulation.

Pupils eligible for free school meals are 2.3 times more likely to have SLCN than those not eligible. SLCN may manifest itself in pupils’ limited social interactions, poor literacy skills, poor behaviour, low self-esteem and poor levels of achievement.

Identifying pupils with SLCN

There are several common risk factors to look out for. For example, boys are more likely (at a ratio of 2.5:1) to have SLCN. Boys are also more likely to have poor vocabulary skills (compared with 40 per cent of children with SLCN are not being identified and coded as needing some form of SEN in secondary school pupils.

SLCN in the 3rd key stage identification

SLCN in the 3rd key stage identification

I n the first part of this series last week (January 10), I asked the simple question: what does SLCN stand for? I suspect many secondary school teachers are unfamiliar with the acronym and yet SLCN is a major cause of SEN in secondary school pupils.

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A pupil who is experiencing difficulties with receptive language may do some of the following:

• They may have difficulty following instructions.
• They may repeat sounds or parts of a word (e.g s-s-s).
• They may blink or tap their hands or feet. Some pupils may also change the word they were going to use mid-sentence.
• They may mispronounce often.

A pupil who is experiencing difficulties with social communication/agrammatic language, may do some of the following:

• They may find it difficult to take turns in conversation.
• They may find it difficult to follow social conventions and may have difficulties initiating and maintaining conversations.
• They may find it difficult to understand non-literal language such as metaphors and sarcasm, which they take literally.
• They may have poor eye contact – not appearing to look at you or at peers when talking with them.
• They may show some disruptive or difficult behaviour due to difficulties understanding how to use language flexibly for a range of purposes.
• They may not use much expression in their face or tone of voice.
• They may talk about the same topic of conversation over and over and change topic frequently.

A pupil who is experiencing difficulties with speech sounds may do some of the following:

• They may be unintelligible to unfamiliar listeners.
• They may omit parts of words and/or have difficulties making some specific sounds in speech.
• During phonics work, they may not be able to produce – or discern the difference between – some of the sounds.
• One form of SLCN is stammering although this does not always manifest itself as you might expect. A pupil with a stammer may do some of the following:
• They may prolong sounds (e.g. sssssssory).
• They may “block”, meaning that when they are attempting a word they make no sound at all or make a strangled sound.
• They may repeat sounds or parts of a word (e.g s-s-s-s, or p-p-please).

Understandably, some pupils become tense because of this. There may be some tension in their face – particularly in the muscles around the eyes, lips or neck, and/or make extra movements when they speak, as though they are trying to force words out. They may blink or tap their hands or feet. Some pupils also try to mask their stammer. They may, for example, avoid speaking in certain situations or to certain people. They may also change the word they were going to use mid-sentence.

What can teachers do to help?

A small number of pupils with the most severe SLCN will require specialist support such as speech and language therapy. Some will require some targeted interventions outside of the classroom. Most will require some tailored support in the classroom. And all will benefit from quality first teaching and from a learning environment that supports their development. Before I proffer my own advice on how to support pupils with SLCN, let us hear what the pupils themselves say:

According to the charity, I CAN, pupils with SLCN say that to help them access the curriculum and make more progress they want:

• Opportunities to ask questions and seek clarifications.
• Teachers to use drawings and diagrams such as mind-maps to support verbal instructions.
• Teachers to explain what they need to include in their answers to questions.
• The use of bullet points instead of writing on the whiteboard and in handouts.
• To learn the vocabulary that they need to know before a lesson.

Lessons where the teacher talks briefly and then they work in groups.

Thinking time after a question is asked.

Opportunities to work with a partner.

In the remainder of this series, I will share proven strategies for supporting pupils with SLCN. I will do so under the following headings: Quality first teaching, In-class differentiation, and Additional interventions.

Quality first teaching

The best way to improve outcomes for pupils with SLCN, as with any additional and different learning need, is through quality first teaching because, if we improve the quality of differentiated teaching in the classroom, all pupils – including those with SLCN – will make better progress.

A study by Hamre and Pianta’s research (2005) found that teacher effectiveness had more impact on outcomes than anything else – pupils in the classroom of the most effective teacher out of a group of 50 teachers took just six months to make the same amount of progress that pupils taught by the least effective teacher took two years to achieve.

What’s more, Hamre and Piama’s research (2005) showed that, in the classrooms of the most effective teachers, socio-economic differences were null and void – in other words, pupils from the most disadvantaged backgrounds made the same progress as the least disadvantaged.

Since the National Strategies were launched in the late-1990s, it has been common practice to talk of three waves of intervention for pupils with SEND.

The three-wave model is often expressed as a pyramid similar to Bloom’s taxonomy, whereby Wave 1 sits at the bottom and thus provides the foundations on which all other forms of SEND support are built.

According to the National Strategies, Wave 1 is “quality inclusive teaching which takes into account the learning needs of all the pupils in the classroom”.

As such, if we do not first provide pupils with quality classroom teaching, then no amount of additional intervention and support will help them to catch up.

A 2008 government paper defined the key characteristics of quality first teaching as follows:

• High levels of interaction for all pupils.
• High levels of intervention for all pupils.
• Appropriate use of teacher questioning, modelling and explaining.
• An emphasis on learning through dialogue, with regular opportunities for pupils to talk both individually and in groups.
• An expectation that pupils will accept responsibility for their own learning and work independently.
• An emphasis on encouragement and authentic praise to engage and motivate pupils.

National Strategy guidance also said that quality first teaching includes a balance between the following approaches:

• Directing and telling.
• Demonstrating.
• Explaining and illustrating.
• Questioning and discussing.
• Exploring and investigating.
• Consolidating and embedding.
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Continuing his series on supporting speech, language and communication needs, Matt Bromley looks at the key aspects of quality first teaching.

In the first two articles of this five-part series, I explained what SLCN is and how schools can correctly identify pupils with SLCN and offer them support so that they can access the curriculum, make good progress and achieve success.

The research suggests that pupils with SLCN would like:

- Opportunities to ask questions and seek clarifications.
- Teachers to use drawings and diagrams such as mind-maps and concept webs to support verbal instructions.
- Teachers to explain what they need to include in their answers to questions.
- The use of bullet points instead of writing on the whiteboard and in handouts.
- To learn the vocabulary that they need to know before a lesson.
- Lessons where the teacher talks briefly and then they work in groups.
- Thinking after a lesson is asked.
- Opportunities to use direct instructions.

As outlined last week, at the heart of good practice is making sure that pupils have a clear understanding of the quality first teaching model – one that focuses on differentiation, and additional interventions. Last week I began to explore what is meant by the term “quality first teaching”, and I outlined how we can introduce pupils to new curriculum content in four distinct stages: telling, showing, doing, and practising.

Telling, I said, is the most effective, expedient way for pupils to acquire new information. It works like this: simply, the teacher – that educated, experienced expert at the front of class – tells pupils what they need to know. This is not to suggest that sometimes, for some purposes, other approaches are not also effective, but teacher explanations remain the most efficient method of teaching – not to mention the least likely to lead to misconceptions among pupils and a misunderstanding of the teaching process by pupils who cannot or should not do.

There are a few more tips to consider when using direct instruction with pupils with SLCN. Because pupils with SLCN:

- Find it difficult to listen and understand lots of words.
- Need more time to process spoken language.
- Have difficulty separating out words, sounds, or phrases.
- Can have visual strengths.
- Can have strong visual memory.

The teacher can benefit from direct instruction in which their teachers:

- Use simple words.
- Use fewer words.
- Display key words on the board.
- Use sentence stems, mnemonics and other “schema” prompts.

Showing, I said, is when teachers, having first explained something, make effective and plentiful use of objects that exemplify the new work, as well as exemplars from a range of different contexts – what show pupils what talk should look like and what makes such products work.

Good models demonstrate works as well as what does not work, and it is important to show pupils what excellent looks like by sharing models of the very best work, both their own and others’. This is an essential if we are to support pupils with SLCN.

Showing is also an essential if we are to support pupils with SLCN. It works well because the teacher engages pupils’ minds through direct instruction and helps them to understand their decisions and by prompting further decision-making.

The teacher’s role is not to construct another model herself, but to ask targeted questions of pupils to encourage them to complete the model together, as well as provide additional feedback along the way and drip-key vocabulary into the mix.

The teacher, therefore, will mostly be engaging in question and answer, such as: “Why did you choose that word?” “Is there another word which might fit better or have more impact?” “Why is this word better than this one?” “Should we use a short sentence here?” “Why/why not?” and “What is the effect of this, do you think?”

Practising, I said, is when pupils, having constructed a model together, do so again but this time do so independently. Independent practice not only provides a crucial third opportunity for pupils to practice (after teacher modelling and co-construction), it also enables pupils to demonstrate their own understanding and for the teacher to assess the extent to which they have “got it.”

Until a pupil completes a task by themselves, we—and perhaps they—cannot be certain that they can do so or that information has been encoded in long-term memory. If pupils succeed, the teacher can move on. If not, the teacher can use the feedback information to guide further teaching of the subject, perhaps re-teaching key elements of it or engaging those pupils who have succeeded in teaching those who have not.

Increasingly independent

Ultimately, whatever form it takes, quality first teaching should ensure that all pupils, including those with SEND:

- Are engaged, in the sense of being active participants in the process of learning or not passive recipients of information.
- Are highly motivated to learn and enthusiastic about learning.
- Are challenged by hard work and know that making mistakes is an essential part of learning.
- Receive effective feedback about where they are, now where they need to go next, and how will they get there.
- As a result of feedback, make progress over time and become increasingly independent and resilient learners.

One way to enable pupils to become increasingly independent and resilient is to employ the popular “B3iME” method, which encourages pupils to persevere when they get stuck and overcome challenges by breaking down a problem into small steps and then facing any problem-specific difficulties, before they ask for help, they must first use: 1. Brain (think for themselves). 2. Buddy (ask a peer). 3. Book or board (use classroom resources including a talk for talk and thinking or imperative phrases). 4. Recall (ask pupils about something they have already read these prompts support pupils to understand the story plot). 5. Open-ended (often with a focus on pictures in books (this works well with illustrations and encourages pupils to express their ideas). 6. Wh prompts that begin with “why”, “what”, “where”, “when”, “why”, and “where” (“what” questions can be used to develop vocabulary).

Distancing: connects the book to pupils’ own life experiences and provides an opportunity for high quality discussion.

More strategies

Some more quality first teaching strategies that work particularly well for pupils with SLCN (and indeed for all pupils) include KWL charts, dual coding, including the use of mind-maps, thinking time, and explicit vocabulary instruction.

KWL charts

One common diagnostic technique and a means of acquiring data on pupils’ starting points is asking pupils at the beginning of a lesson or new topic to identify what they already know (or think they know) about what they are about to study.

Their responses can then be listed in a table or graphic organiser. The contents of the first column provide us with a sense of pupils’ prior knowledge, while also unmasking any misconceptions that may exist and therefore may need to be addressed.

Next, we should ask pupils to identify what “I want to learn” about the topic, and ask them to raise any questions they may have at this early stage. These responses can be recorded in the second column to serve as indicators of areas of interest.

As the unit unfolds, the knowledge and skills that pupils begin to acquire should be recorded in the third column, providing a record for pupils of what “I have learned.”

The purpose of this exercise is to begin a lesson or topic with an initial assessment, perhaps a low-stakes multiple-choice quiz. The results of these pre-tests can yield invaluable evidence about pupils’ prior knowledge and misconceptions and, when repeated at various stages of the teaching sequence, can provide evidence of pupils’ growing knowledge and understanding.

Regardless of the approach taken, information from diagnostic assessments can guide us in planning so that lessons are more responsive to pupils’ needs and existing knowledge-base – surely the very definition of differentiation.

A significant practical implication, of course, is that we must remember to plan opportunities for assessment and allow sufficient “wriggle room” to make adjustments based on the feedback garnered by these assessments.

In-built flexibility like this is not just advisable, it is a key aspect of effective lesson-planning and differentiation because it enables learning to be personalised to match the needs and pace of pupils’ learning – which is essential if we are to support pupils with SLCN. It also ensures that gaps in pupils’ learning are identified and filled, which in turn will avoid all-off-the-peg, one-size-fits-all approach to lesson-planning and enable good progress to be made by all pupils, irrespective of their additional and different needs.

Next week

I will continue to explore these additional quality first teaching strategies when I will focus on dual coding, including the use of mind-maps, thinking time, and explicit vocabulary instruction.

Matt Bromley is an education journalist and author with 18 years’ experience in teaching and leadership. He works as a consultant, speaker, and trainer. Visit www.bromleyeducation.co.uk and read his previous articles in this series or for Matt’s archive of best practice articles for SecEd, visit http://bit.ly/1GjX6Ym

Image: Adobe Stock
Continuing his series, Matt Bromley offers more teaching strategies that are effective for pupils with speech, language, and communication needs.

In this five-part series on supporting pupils with speech, language, and communication needs, we have explained how important it is to identify SLCN in the primary years and the need for pupils to transfer to secondary school so that their communication needs can be put in place. We said that support comes in three waves:

• Wave 1 is quality first teaching
• Wave 2 is in-class differentiation
• Wave 3 is additional interventions

Last week we began looking at Wave 1 support strategies. Before we move on, let’s explore some further strategies for quality first teaching that work particularly well for pupils with SLCN (and indeed for all pupils).

Dual coding

Double coding is the combination of words and images. We have two specific and related processing subsystems: one specialises in representing and processing non-verbal objects or events; the other specialises in representing verbal information. The benefit of using both verbal and visual processing at the same time is that it doubles the capacity of our working memory if we utilise both verbal and visual processing at the same time.

What’s more, dual coding allows us to boost the information traces in our long-term memory (as two different codes are stored in the brain) and it enables us to recall – or recognise – the information in two different ways.

For example, if we read an image with a complementary word (written or preferably spoken), we’re utilising both verbal and visual processing (for the written word) and an iconic process (depicting the image). Dual coding works particularly well for pupils with SLCN because, as we have already seen, these pupils tend to have strong visual processing capabilities and benefit from the use of diagrams such as mind-maps and short bullet-points rather than lots of dense text.

However, as with all teaching strategies, dual coding only works when it’s done well. Reading a text aloud in parallel with the same written text on-screen (such as reading text verbatim from a PowerPoint slide) – even if this is short bullet-points – is a bad combination because pupils are required to conduct one and the same verbal/semantic process in two different ways. Rather than splitting and therefore doubling their processing capacity, they end up twice the information using one process, thus halving working memory capacity. As a result, working memory becomes overloaded in what’s known as the “redunancy effect”.

In 1974, Mary Budd Rowe conducted research into the effects of formative assessment, found that pupils with SLCN and those who are reluctant to volunteer answers get to find their voice; second, the garments, over-cool pupils get to learn to listen to others, it shows a spirit or ethos of cooperation which is at the heart of formative assessment.

Once the teachers in Rowe’s study had had the opportunity to get used to increasing their wait time, Rowe went back to look at the effect it had had. She found that pupils’ answers were longer:

• Pupils’ failure to respond had decreased.
• Responses were more confident.
• Pupils challenged and/or improved other pupils’ answers.
• More alternative explanations were being offered.

Teachers involved in the King’s Medway Transition Research Project, who began in 1999 and was undertaken by Professors Paul Black and Dylan William as part of their initial research into the effects of formative assessment, found that “increasing waiting time after asking questions proved difficult to start with... the pause after asking the question was sometimes painful and unnatural... but given more thinking time, students seemed to realise that a more thoughtful answer was required (and that they now) give an answer and an explanation without additional prompting.”

For obvious reasons, pupils with SLCN particularly benefit from the increase in wait time. They are more likely to process what has been asked and to articulate a response. To ensure thinking time is especially effective for them, the teacher or teaching assistant can warn pupils they’re going to ask a question, explicitly teach clarification questions, model asking questions, use strategies such as “snowballing”, flag up questions at the beginning of a lesson, provide a list of key questions in advance, or ask pupils to draw and/or write down an answer before they put their hand up.

Explicit vocabulary instruction

Department for Education research suggests that, by the age of seven, the gap in the vocabulary known by children in the top and bottom quartiles is something like 4,000 words (children in the top quartile know around 7,000 words).

For this reason, when teaching pupils with SLCN, teachers need to be mindful of the importance of vocabulary and support its development so that pupils who, because of a specific need, did not develop this foundational knowledge before they started school and through primary school are now helped to access the curriculum.

One way to do this is to plan group work activities which provide an opportunity for pupils with SLCN to mingle with pupils with a more developed vocabulary, to hear language being used by pupils of their own age and in ways that they might not otherwise encounter. Another solution is to model the clear and correct use of spoken language. In other words, we should give unambiguous instructions, use accurate descriptive and positional language, utilise precise terminology where appropriate, and give clear feedback.

Next, teachers can use simple, direct language and place verbs at the beginning of instructions. “Teacher talk” is not necessarily better than the language pupils access in other environments but it is different. As a result, pupils’ language proficiency might be different from that required to access the curriculum, or even to understand simple classroom instructions.

Confusion and disorientation result from the fact that pupils are unfamiliar with the language structures and ‘lexical density’ of the more formal teacherly language of the classroom. This does not mean that teachers should use the same language as their pupils, but that they might sometimes need to use simpler language and emphasise important words. For example, teachers can teach active listening skills. Most pupils can hear, but not naturally active listeners. Active listening requires selective and sustained attention, working memory, cognitive processing, and information storage and recall mechanisms. Teachers can help pupils develop these skills by giving them tasks such as listening for specific or key information, listening in order to answer specific questions, and listening to follow instructions.

Teachers can also teach note-taking skills whereby pupils have to write down the key points ascertained from a piece of spoken language. What’s more, they can develop communication skills, such as turn-taking and the use of eye contact.

Teachers can build on pupils’ language by elaborating on their answers to questions, adding new information, extending the conversation through further questions, or reinforcing language through repetition. To help pupils with SLCN build their vocabularies, teachers can also:

• Use fewer “what?” questions and use more “why?” and “how?” questions.
• Give pupils time to rehearse answers to questions, perhaps by discussing their answers in pairs before sharing them more widely.
• Ask each question has been asked, give pupils thinking time before they are expected to share their answers.
• Encourage “no-hands-up” policy as often as possible.
• Model the kind of language they expect pupils to use in group discussions and answers.
• Explicitly teach key words in their subject and by repeating key words as often as possible (give key words a home worksheet and test pupils on their spelling and meaning and so that they become the expected discourse of all pupils).

In the introduction to the above, teachers of pupils with SLCN should make sure that the development of spoken language permeates the school day. After all, spoken language is used all day, every day so we should take advantage and build spoken language activities into daily routines, such as during tutor time (e.g. ask a question of each pupil that must be answered in a sentence), when handing out materials, when pupils enter and leave the classroom, and when giving instructions.

Teachers can also make sure that pupils have a regular opportunity to speak. The teacher tends to dominate classroom discussion – and it is right that teachers talk a lot because they are the experts in the room in possession of the knowledge and experience that pupils need. But it is also important that pupils get a chance to interact with the teacher and with each other and to do so beyond responding to closed questions.

What’s more, teachers can plan opportunities for one-to-one discussion. Spoken language develops best through paired conversation and when one of the people in the pair has a better developed vocabulary. Therefore, it is worth investigating ways of pairing up pupils with people with more sophisticated language skills, perhaps an older pupil or a parent or volunteer. This could be a case of volunteers reading a book with a pupil or simply engaging in conversation. One-to-one conversation also enables young people with SLCN to develop conversational skills such as turn-taking, information and eye contact.

Next week

In the final installment, I will conclude my discussion about quality first teaching strategies and explore the Waves 2 and 3 intervention strategies.

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The final part of Matt Bromley’s series on supporting speech, language and communication needs looks at strategies for effective differentiation and additional interventions.

Earlier in this series I shared some common characteristics to help identify speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). One of these was why support for SLCN is crucial to enabling pupils to access the curriculum and make progress. I also explained my proven strategies for supporting pupils with SLCN through quality first teaching (wave 1).

Before we focus on proven strategies for in-class differentiation (wave 2) and additional interventions (wave 3), and to conclude my discussion of quality first teaching strategies, I would like to add some further thoughts on the explicit teaching of vocabulary (see part four).

The Educational Endowment Foundation (EEF) report, Preparing for Literacy (2018), claims that there is relatively limited evidence about how best to improve vocabulary, but the existing evidence suggests that the following should be considered:

- Providing pupils with a rich language environment (implicit approaches) as well as directly extending pupils’ vocabulary (explicit approaches).
- Carefully selecting high-frequency words for explicit teaching.
- Developing the numbers of words pupils know (broadly) and their understanding of relationships between words and the contexts in which words can be used (depth).
- Providing multiple opportunities to hear and use new vocabulary.

In terms of selecting high-frequency words for explicit instruction, it may be wise to begin by teaching the Tier 1 words that pupils are likely to need for good literacy. These words are not subject-specific terminology nor necessarily complex words, but are words that are vital to pupils’ ability to access the school curriculum and to demonstrate their understanding.

Once these words have been identified, they need to be taught on a number of occasions and in different contexts. Beck offers this possible teaching sequence:

- Read a sentence in which the word appears.
- Show pupils the word and get them to say it out loud.
- Discuss possible meanings of the word.
- Identify other words that sound similar or are familiar (e.g. Greek or Latin roots, common prefixes and suffixes).
- Re-read the sentence with the word in it to detect any contextual clues.
- Explain the meaning of the word through definition and the use of synonyms.
- Provide several other examples of the word being used.
- Ask pupils to use the word in sentences of their own.

Another key feature of this approach is that it involves high-quality interactions with children that will help to develop their communication and language. A distinction is sometimes drawn between talking with children and simply talking to children. Talking to children tends to be more passive, while talking with children is based on their immediate experiences and activities and is likely to be more effective. "When done well, high-quality interactions often look effortless, they are not easy to do well and professional development is likely to be beneficial."

Multiple frameworks exist to help structure high-quality interactions, an example occurs when a teacher and pupil collaborate on a task and the teacher’s strategies are highly tuned to the pupil’s capabilities and motivations. The teacher is responsive to the pupil’s intentions, focuses on spontaneous learning, and provides feedback for the pupil’s progress. This is a key feature of this approach and the use of a variety of questions helps to develop and extend pupil’s thinking.

Sustained shared thinking involves two or more pupils working together to clarify an issue, execute activities, or extend a narrative. Key features include all parties contributing to the interaction – one aimed at extending and developing pupils’ thinking. According to the EEF, techniques that teachers might use include:

- Tuning in: listening carefully to what is being said and asking questions to check understanding.
- Showing genuine interest, giving whole attention, eye contact, and smiling and nodding.
- Asking pupils to elaborate: “I really want to know more about this.”
- Re-capping: “So you think that…”
- Giving their own experience: “I like to listen to…”
- Clarifying ideas: “So you think we should wear coats in case it rains?”
- Using encouragement to extend thinking: “You have thought really hard about your tower, but what can you do now?”
- Suggesting: “You may want to try doing it like this…”
- Reminding: “Don’t forget that you said we should wear coats in case it rains.”
- Asking open questions: “How do you…?” “Why does this…?”, “What happens next?”

Waves and 3

Some pupils will require more tailored support in the guise of wave 2 in-class differentiations and wave 3 additional interventions which take place outside the classroom and off the taught timetable.

Let us first be clear that the ultimate aim of such additional support, in most cases, is for it to become redundant over time. In other words, we want pupils with SLCN to become increasingly independent.

Such intervention strategies may take the form of one-to-one support from a teaching assistant, small group support from an SEN specialist or support from external agencies such as speech and language therapists.

Let us first be clear that the ultimate aim of such additional support, in most cases, is for it to become redundant over time. In other words, we want pupils with SLCN to become increasingly independent.

As such, it is important to ensure that all strategic interventions aimed at pupils with SLCN are monitored while they are happening. Often, schools review an intervention once it has ended, but this is not enough. Interventions must be monitored while they are still taking place in order to ascertain whether or not they are working, or working as well as they should be. If the monitoring data suggests a strategy is not having the desired effect, or not working for some pupils, then it must be stopped or changed before more time and money is wasted.

Another point worth making concerns the role of teaching assistants, because it is often they and not teachers who lead wave 2 and 3 interventions for pupils with SLCN including SLCN. So the big question is this: what is the best way to utilise teaching assistants? Here are some tips inspired by the EEF research. Teaching assistants:

- Should not be used as an informal teaching resource when monitoring at scale.
- Should be used to add value to what teachers do, rather than replace teachers – pupils with SLCN need as much, if not more, exposure to the teacher as all other pupils.
- Should be used to help pupils with SLCN to develop independent learning skills and manage their own learning. To achieve this, they need to be trained to avoid prioritising task completion and instead concentrate on helping pupils with SLCN to develop personal ownership of tasks.
- Should be fully prepared for their role in the classroom and need access to sufficient training and time to meet the teacher outside of class.

Furthermore, when supporting pupils with SLCN in one-on-one or small group settings, teaching assistants should use structured interventions. The most effective intervention strategies are:

- Brief (20 to 50 minutes).
- Regular (three to five times per week).
- Carefully timetabled.
- Staffed by well-trained teaching assistants (five to 30 hours’ training per intervention).
- Well-planned with structured resources and clear objectives.
- Assessed to identify appropriate pupils, guide areas for intervention and plan progress.
- Liaison to classroom teaching.

Differencing & interventions

In terms of in-class differentiation, pupils with SLCN are often helped by:

- The use of modified language.
- The use of visual prompts.
- The pre-teaching of subject-specific vocabulary, as appropriate.
- Access to a social skills group.

In terms of additional interventions, pupils with SLCN can often benefit from:

- Small group or one-to-one support for language to address specifically identified pupil targets.
- Access to additional ICT teaching such as typing, dictaphone, tablet and so on.
- A referral to and advice from the speech and language therapist or the Learning Language Service (LLS).
- On-going advice from specialist teachers.
- Advice from an educational psychologist.

A graduated approach

The provision of SEN support including that for pupils with SLCN should follow the Code of Practice – often takes the form of a four-part cycle of assess, plan, do, review.

The cycle recommended by the Code of Practice posits a “graduated approach” whereby actions are reviewed and refined as our understanding of a pupil’s needs – and indeed the support they require – increases.

Assess: At this stage, information is gathered from on-going, day-to-day assessments and helps to form judgements about the progress an individual pupil with SLCN is making, as well as to highlight any barriers that pupils may face.

Where concerns about a pupil’s progress persist, further discussions with the pupil, their parents and the SENCO may be necessary. It may also be necessary to consider other specialist training, or to request advice from a speech and language therapist.

Plan: At this stage, everyone needs to agree what additional and different support will be put in place. The planning stage should involve the pupil, parents, relevant and school staff who know the pupil well. The first step is to agree some targets for the pupil in order to focus attention on what needs to be improved first, and to give the pupil a clear idea of what they need to do to accelerate the pace of their progress.

To help the pupil achieve their targets, additional tailored support needs to be put in place and this may include self-contained strategies, approaches or resources both in and out of class, such as those outlined above. In this last stage, clear and realistic timescales need to be set for monitoring and reviewing the plan. As I say above, it is crucial that additional interventions are considered on-going monitoring rather than just reviewed at their end-point.

Do: The third part of the cycle is “do”. It is the responsibility of every staff member who comes into contact with the pupil with SLCN to implement the plan on a day-to-day basis. It is not the sole domain of the SENCO or the children’s learning support staff.

- Delivering quality first teaching to the pupil in every lesson.
- Enacting any specific adjustments, strategies or approaches to classroom teaching as identified in the pupil’s support plan.
- Liaising with teaching assistants who are providing in-class support to pupils with SLCN.
- Implementing any targeted additional, out-of-class interventions as identified in the plan.
- Engaging in on-going monitoring of pupil progress and responding to the data by making any necessary changes to the pupil’s support.
- Communicating regularly with the pupil, their parents, the SENCO and any other external agents who are involved.

Review: The school needs to formally evaluate how successfully the interventions and support they have offered have met the pupil’s needs. At the review meeting, it is helpful to consider the following questions:

- What progress has the pupil made with regards addressing their SLCN? Have they achieved their agreed targets? What is the evidence for this?
- What impact has the support/intervention had on the pupil being able to access the curriculum, make progress and communicate their learning? What are the pupil’s, parents’ and professionals’ views on the effectiveness and impact of the additional support/intervention?
- What changes need to be made to the pupil’s support to ensure that progress continues?

The SEND Code of Practice makes clear that this term “review” is used broadly rather than to mean some sort of formal review. The view is that a regular review shows a pupil has made good progress and no longer requires additional support in order to mitigate their SEN. This pupil should be monitored in order to ensure that their progress is sustained through inclusion of the additional support.

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