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A comparison of traditional SLCN support and Language Link interventions

Background

Language Link is an assessment and intervention package used by schools throughout the UK to boost language skills through universal and targeted interventions. To assess the impact of Infant Language Link we compared the progress of children from schools supported by the package with those from control schools supported by typical in school SLCN support.

The study took place in 13 schools across Birmingham, Kent and Essex with wide and varied catchment areas. The 6 experimental schools were recruited through the Language Link website as schools that had used the Infant Language Link package for at least 1 year. The 7 control schools were identified by local specialist support services as schools providing a typical support offer for children with SLCN (providing the EYFS curriculum and no specific package for supporting SLCN).

Participants

Children aged between 4;01 and 5;02 were identified for the study if they scored below the 24th percentile on the Infant Language Link assessment. Children with English as an Additional Language (EAL) were included, as long as they were not new to English.

	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
Experimental Schools	20	16	36
Control Schools	18	14	32

Method

The experimental schools used the Infant Language Link recommendations and interventions with all of the study pupils for two terms. Schools were recommended to carry out the Reception year listening group first and follow this with up to three themed general language groups. Between 2 and 4 groups were carried out with the pupils. A plan detailing the aims, target vocabulary, resources and detailed instructions for each activity is provided by the Language Link programme.

The control schools provided their typical classroom and intervention support for pupils with language and communication needs. Some children received 1:1 intervention from a teaching assistant if this was recommended by local specialist services, e.g. SaLT, but most of the pupils only received support within the classroom.

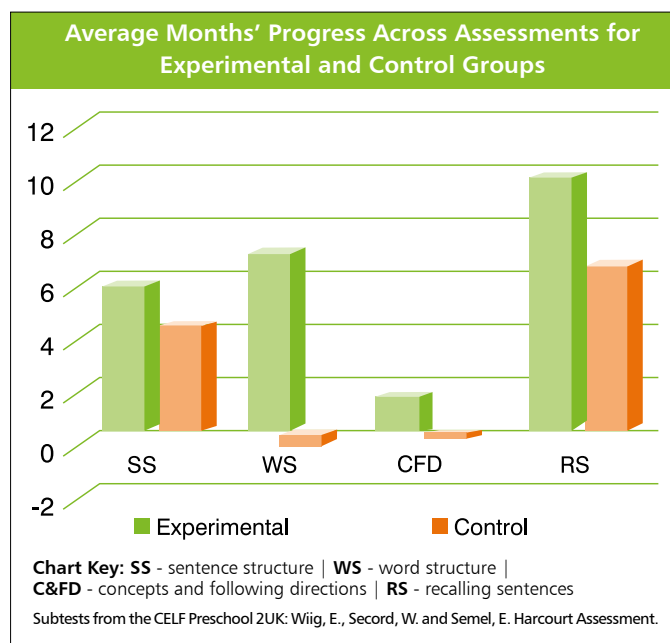
All children were assessed at the beginning and end of the study period on a range of recognised speech and language assessments by the research SaLT team.

Results

Would the Language Link interventions make a difference to the children's language skills?

The results of the study were overwhelmingly positive. There were highly significant differences in performance, with the experimental group making more progress compared to the control group.

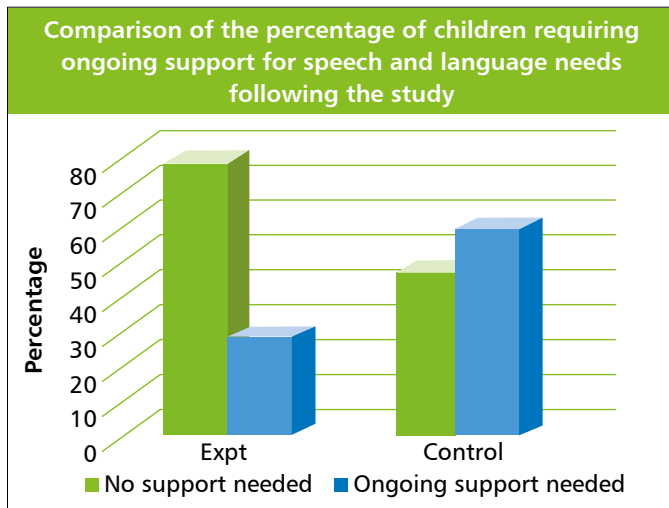
Across the standardised assessment measures, the children in the experimental group made an average of 5 months' progress, above expected progress due to maturation, compared to an average of only 2 months' progress for the control children.



Would children following Language Link make accelerated progress in comparison to their peers?

At the beginning of the study, 36 children from experimental schools were identified as needing support and at the end of this study this figure was reduced to just 9 children (25%) requiring ongoing support.

Many children in the control schools also made progress, however there were significant differences between the two groups. At the beginning of the study, 32 children were identified in the control schools and at the end of the study 17 children (53.1%) continued to require ongoing support.



Comparison of the percentage of children in the experimental and control groups needing further language support at T2.

Would children in the experimental group maintain these gains?

Of the 36 experimental children, 23 were re-screened using the Language Link assessment by their schools at the start of Year 2. These children had received little or no intervention in this time.

	Ongoing support needed at end of study	No support needed at end of study	Ongoing support needed 14 months following study	No support needed 14 months following study
Experimental Children (n = 23)	5	18	4	19

The results show that the children had maintained their gains in language, indicating that the intervention had 'closed the gap' between the children and their peers.

Here's what the schools thought:

"It's great for early identification of speech and language needs. It takes the guess work away and selects the appropriate intervention for you to support the children with. It's a super weapon to add to your wave 1 assessments, it helps you to identify speech and language needs early and rapidly."

K. Bennet, SENCo, St Dunstan's Primary School

"We have been using Language Link in our school for many years now as the children thoroughly enjoy the activities and we see the progress they make whilst having fun!"

K. Burgess, Langley Primary School

CONCLUSIONS

The Language Link interventions enabled children to make more progress with their language skills across the year, than children in the control schools.

There were highly significant differences in performance for the experimental group at T1 and T2 compared to the control group, with more progress made across all the standardised assessment measures.

Infant Language Link is an effective intervention to help schools close the attainment gap.

Infant Language Link is used by schools across the UK in the same way that it was used in the study, so these are the results that you can expect from using the package in your school.



The Wye Forest Early Intervention Project: Raising awareness of SLCN in Reception.

In 2008 Worcestershire LA and Speech and Language Therapy services teamed up to use Language Link to improve early identification for children in the Wye Forest area.

Schools in the Wye Forest area provide communication programmes as an integral part of the curriculum for many children, with the support of the local speech and language therapy (SLT) service. However, referral data showed that 63% of schools' referrals to SLT were made in Year 2 and above with only 20% of children referred in their Reception year. The SLT service wanted to increase Early Years staff confidence to refer children.

Worcestershire LA funded a pilot project for 17 schools to use Language Link for 1 year. The project had 3 key objectives:

- To improve referral rates in the Early Years.
- To build on well-established joint working relationships between the LA, schools and the PCT.
- To evaluate the impact of using Infant Language Link.

Implementation

All schools taking part were offered two training sessions. The first session focussed on the assessment and the second on intervention. The schools were asked to screen all their new intake of reception pupils during the Autumn term and then ran interventions during the spring and summer terms. At the end of the year the children were re-assessed. During the year the schools continued to have access to the SLT service and some additional in-school training sessions were offered by the local SLT team.

Headline Results

The outcomes on reassessment showed progress for both individual children, and at a whole class level. Feedback from teachers was positive and 94% of the schools continued to use Infant Language funded from their own school budget.



The project team reported a number of positive outcomes:

- **100%** of children who needed to be referred were picked up.
- **78.4%** of children with identified SLCN no longer needed support at the end of the year.
- **35.4%** increase in teacher confidence.
- **72%** of reception classes delivered whole class level interventions as well as small groups.

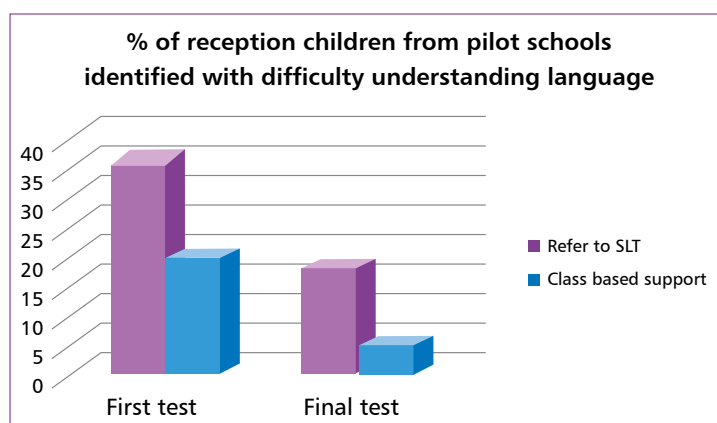
What did the teachers say?

'good analysis for identified children no more hit and miss assessments'

'could decide what to tackle as a whole class approach'

'identifying children who have difficulties whom you would not expect - 2 big surprises this term'

'makes you aware of the whole class as well as individuals'



2018 UPDATE

Following the pilot projects in 2008, Worcestershire LA rolled the project out across the county. The LA provided the funding to buy the package for each school with the schools taking responsibility for funding subscriptions from their own budget in subsequent years. Today over 70% of schools throughout the county continue to use Infant Language Link.

The impact of using Language Link in one Kent Primary School.

Background

Language Link is an assessment and intervention package used by schools to enable pupils with developmental language difficulties and those new to English access the curriculum. To investigate the impact of Language Link interventions a small scales study was carried out in a large mainstream primary school in Kent.

The study took place in a large, three form entry primary school in East Kent. The school had a wide and varied catchment area. Staff were familiar with the Language Link package and had experience delivering the package in previous academic years. All staff involved had previously received training in how to use the package.

Method

The Language Link assessment identified 34 pupils aged between 4:01 and 5:00 years to take part in this study. They were assessed on a range of standardised tests and then assigned to either an experimental group (n=20) or a control group (n=14). The experimental group was divided into smaller groups of 3 or 4 pupils who all received the same small group intervention aimed at improving their understanding of concepts and the ability to follow instructions. The groups ran for 8 x 30 min sessions and were delivered by an experienced Teaching Assistant.

Each Language Link group session involved a warm-up game, two 10 minute activities, and a plenary session. A plan detailing the aims, target vocabulary, resources needed and detailed instructions for each activity is provided by the Language Link programme.

	MALE	FEMALE
Experimental Group	14	6
Control Group	3	11
Total	17	17

This study set out to answer two important questions:

- 1) Would the intervention make a difference?
- 2) What areas of language would improve?

Results

The children in the experimental group who took part in the Language Link intervention made more progress in their ability to follow instructions involving concepts than those in the control group.

The children in the experimental group also made more progress in other areas of their language.

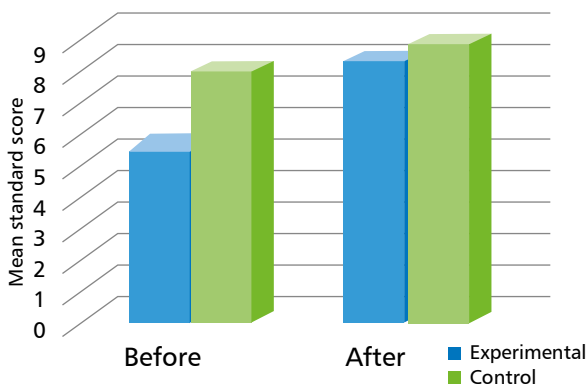
Mean and SD for experimental and control groups before intervention (T1) and after intervention (T2)

	BPVS		CELF		TROG	
	T1	T2	T1	T2	T1	T2
Experimental Group	92.7 (9.79)	93.2 (8.35)	5.45 (2.43)	8.15 (2.49)	84.9 (6.93)	89.5 (10.3)
Control Group	96.5 (5.96)	97.3 (7.52)	7.78 (1.36)	8.64 (2.06)	91.9 (12.3)	91.2 (13.5)

There was a significant difference ($p < 0.001$) between the two groups before intervention but not after intervention on the CELF 4UK Concepts and Directions test. The children in the experimental group made significant progress in their ability to follow instructions.

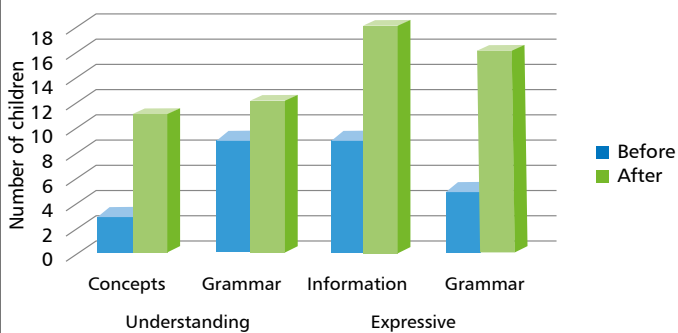
Did the children who received intervention make progress with their understanding of language?

Mean standard score for understanding before and after Language Link intervention



How did the experimental group's language skills change?

Number of children scoring within expected range for their age before and after the Language Link Intervention



After the interventions more children were scoring within the expected range for their age for understanding and expressive language.

CONCLUSIONS

The Language Link intervention group impacted positively on the children in the study. The group targeted understanding of concepts and following instructions.

The children made significant progress in this area compared to the control group. The experimental group also improved in their use of oral language with more children scoring within the expected range for their age following the intervention.



The Language Link Effect: pupil attainment and staff practice.

A key aim of Language Link is to train school staff to identify developmental language difficulties and support them by using recommended strategies effectively. The package aims to train staff to improve outcomes for children.

To investigate the impact of using the Language Link approach, class teachers and staff were surveyed about their experiences of using the package and the difference they felt it had made to their pupils and working practices.

Method

Three surveys were carried out between 2013 and 2017. Data was collected at training sessions and online. In total there were **962** participants across the three surveys. All participants were familiar with the package.

	Number	%
Teachers	161	16.7
Sencos	196	20.4
Teaching Assistants	598	62.2
Senior Leaders	7	0.7

Headline Results

The response to all three questionnaires was positive with **93.4%** of respondents reporting Language Link had made a positive difference to their children.

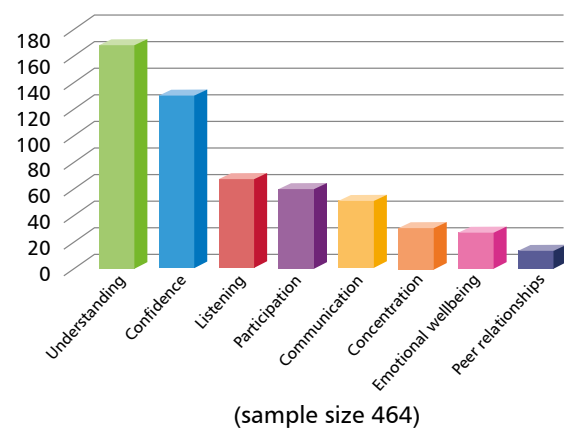
Staff also reported a change in their own behaviour with **71.2%** of support staff reporting they had changed the way they work with children resulting from using Language Link.

The difference Language Link makes

Has using Language Link made a difference to your pupils?

93.4% of participants reported that Language Link had made a difference to their pupils (sample size 962)

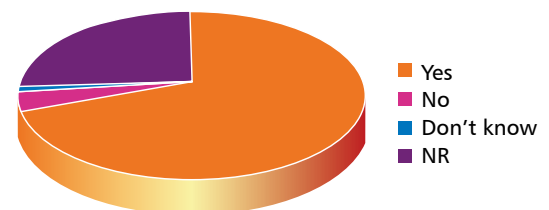
Where have you seen the greatest level of change as a result of using Language Link



Has using Language Link made a difference to your pupil's attainment?

69.2% of participants reported that using Language Link had made a difference to attainment (Sample size 962)

Has using Language Link made a difference to your pupil's attainment?



The greatest improvements were reported for speaking and listening followed by reading.

Has Classroom practice changed?

Has using Language Link made you change the way you work with children?

62.5% of participants reported they changed the way they work with children (sample size 962).

A higher number of support staff reported changes to their practice (71.2%) than teachers and Sencos (48.3%).

How have you changed in your classroom practice?

Participants of survey 3 were asked to rate their use of strategies before using Language Link and then again at the end of their first year. There was a significant difference in the frequency of use across strategies for all staff ($P < 0.0001$, sample size 346) with the frequency increasing.

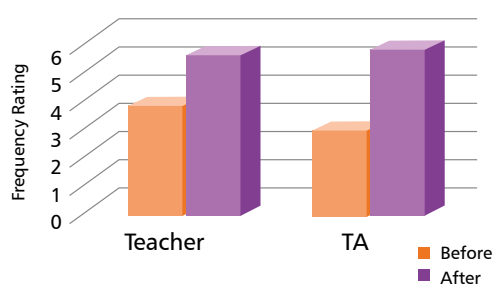
CONCLUSIONS

Overall, using Language Link impacts positively on both children and staff. The majority of staff reported improvements in understanding and listening skills as well as boosting confidence and increased participation in classroom activities.

A high proportion of teaching staff felt that use of Language Link had raised attainment of their pupils beyond expectations.

A very encouraging by product of using the package was the change in classroom practice reported by the majority of participants with increased use of classroom support strategies.

Overall average frequency rating for use of strategies before and after using Language Link



How Derby City reduced waiting times for children with speech difficulties by introducing Speech Link

Speech difficulties are easy to identify right? Well, in reality when a child's speech is a bit unclear schools can find it hard to know if this is appropriate, delayed or disordered. Speech Link was developed by our team of expert Speech and Language Therapists to help schools decide which children needed to see a therapist and which children just needed a simple school based programme. When Derby City wanted to look at reducing numbers of inappropriate referrals to their over loaded Speech Therapy services they decided to use Speech Link. Here's how they got on.

Background

Within Derby City, referrals for school aged children with speech sound difficulties to speech therapy services showed a wide amount of variation. Many children failed to meet the criteria and schools were left unsure of what to do next. In 2006 the local authority purchased Speech Link for 25 schools across Derby City.

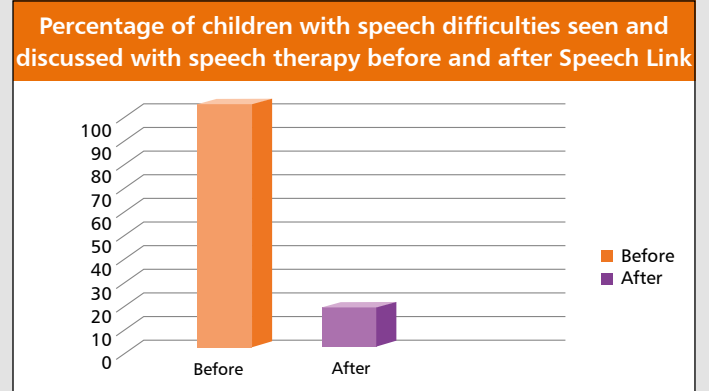
Objectives

The LEA and SLT team overseeing the project set themselves 3 key objectives:

- Ensure only the children who needed therapy were referred.
- Reduce time spent screening the referrals.
- Raise confidence levels in school to support children with delayed speech development.

Results

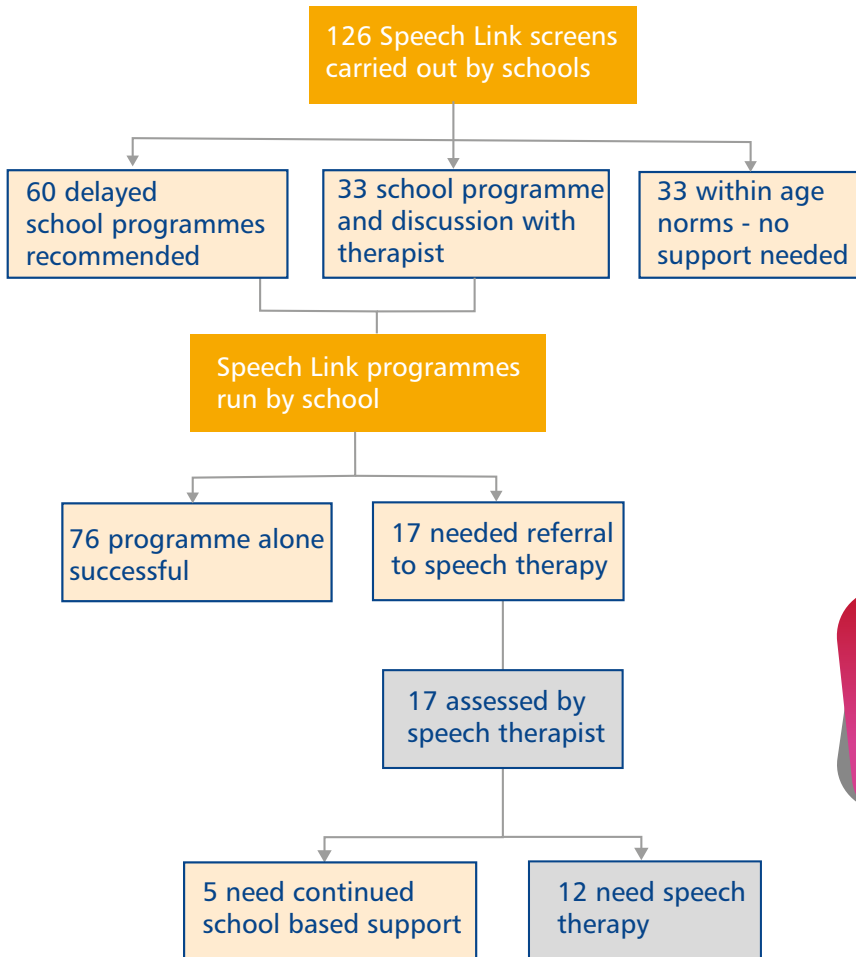
There were extremely positive outcomes for both schools and therapy services. 126 children were identified by schools at the beginning of the project. Previously the therapy service would have seen each child or had a telephone conversation with the school about the child. The schools use of Speech Link dramatically reduced the number of referrals to the therapy service. Of the 126 children identified by schools only 33 were discussed with the therapists. Out of those children 17 were assessed and 12 of those went on to have regular speech therapy. 76 children were successfully managed in school through Speech Link programmes.



Other findings:

- Therapist time was targeted to manage children with the most complex difficulties so **waiting times** for initial assessment for all children in the SLT service **is reduced**.
- **No child** in the 25 participating schools has an **unidentified** speech difficulty.
- School **staff** are **empowered** to identify speech difficulties and implement programmes appropriately.
- Teaching Assistants have developed **additional skills** and experience in identifying and supporting children with speech difficulties.

Speech Link support pathway



Source: Report of Pilot Study Introducing Speech Link into 25 Primary Schools in Derby City, Derbyshire County PCT, NHS

What did the teachers think about Speech Link?

"Helps us determine the difference between delay and disorder"

"Precise, quick identification of how best to support children"

"We don't have to wait for a therapist to give us a programme"

"Children are motivated by the resources"



WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

Following the project, Speech Link was rolled out to the rest of the schools across Derby City and the therapists reported that it had promoted joint work between their services and school staff.

The Therapy services no longer needed to use telephone screening of referrals so waiting times for initial assessments were greatly reduced.

CASE STUDY



The Scarborough Pledge Initiative

Schools across Scarborough have introduced Language Link as part of a wider project to improve outcomes for children in their care. We talked to Head Teacher Vicki Logan to see how Language Link had worked for her school.

Background

In March of 2015 an Education Summit was held in Scarborough to discuss the opportunities and challenges for the local area and what more could be done to improve the outcomes and life chances for young people in terms of their experiences and achievements. As a result, the Scarborough Pledge was created to engage the local community in an upwards shift of perception and ambition for children within Scarborough.

A wide range of diverse but integrated projects and initiatives were implemented to see improvements in standards of education provision to close the attainment gap for the most disadvantaged young people. One of these projects was to develop a model of good practice in relation to speech and language development, building capacity amongst primary staff to support this critical foundation for all learning.

We contacted Vicki Logan, Head Teacher of Overdale Primary, Scarborough to explain how they had used Language Link as part of the Scarborough pledge.

The Pilot Project

Language Link was introduced to 5 schools in Scarborough in 2016. Each school sent three members of staff to a one day training session and then returned to school to implement the package and cascade the training. Year R, 1 and 2 pupils were screened during the Autumn Term 2016 and recommended interventions were carried out during the year. In Autumn 2017 the children who had received interventions were re-tested using the Language Link assessment.

The Results

The results were overwhelmingly positive. The teachers and staff enjoyed using the package. Across all five schools 93 children were identified by the initial screening as needing support with 35 of them needing advice from an outside agency. At the end of the pilot 48 of them no longer needed support and only 21 continued to need long term support.

Level of need	Autumn 2016	Autumn 2017
Age Appropriate	-----	48
Discuss with SaLT (Red)	35	21
Class based programme (Blue)	58	33

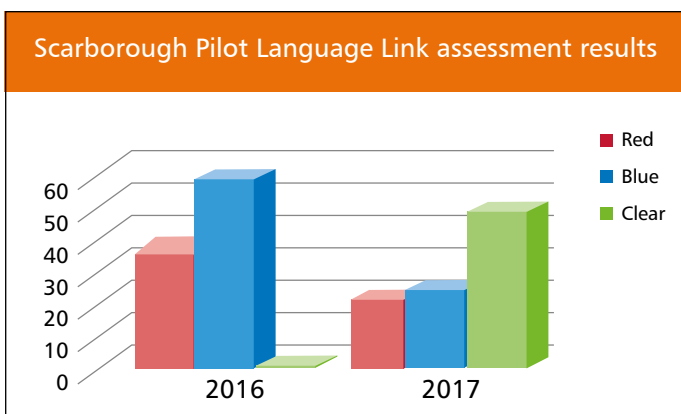
Vicki reported...

"The programme has not only been highly effective in identifying needs in children that we, as educationalists, presume require support but also in identifying children whose teachers did not think they had communication or comprehension gaps. However, on completion of the target interventions these children have made accelerated progress, which is an excellent outcome. Limited language skills and low levels of communication

is the major barrier to learning in communities where there are higher levels of deprivation and low aspirations, the Language Link programme enables whole classes to be assessed and provides a programme to break this barrier down. It's a joy to work with and to see the children make progress because they have access to the interventions that meet their personalised needs."



Scarborough Pilot Language Link assessment results



There was a variation between schools with environmental factors, for example, staffing pressures influencing how much the package was used. The level of need identified at the first screen also varied markedly between schools. Overall all schools felt the package had a positive impact on their children.

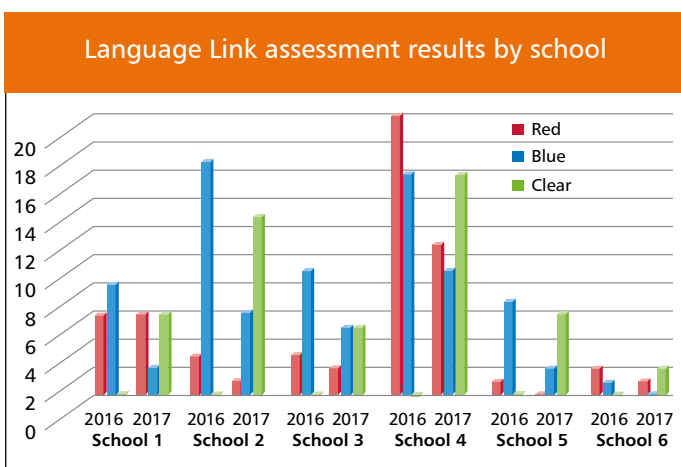
Teacher Julie Stewart described how she uses Language Link to support SLCN throughout the school.

Setting up the programme was a daunting task but once the children had been assessed (this took the largest amount of time) everything else fell into place.

The sessions are very easy to follow and adapt where necessary and recording the progress of the children is simple. Within the first few weeks of running the reception class program there was a noticed improvement in the children's listening and concentration skills. The children have also now begun to support each other within the sessions and the peer support given is now evident in class situations too.

The children involved in the sessions are keen to take part and ask me every day if it is their turn to come and "Play listening games today". Other staff running the sessions for different year groups around school have commented that the children enjoy the sessions and how easy the programme is to follow.

Language Link assessment results by school



The Future

Initially, the project was for a pilot of five schools, but due to the success of this pilot a further ten schools have joined the project in 2017, with 12 more joining in 2018 again supported by the Scarborough Pledge Project.

Join our 2023

national research project

In the news

Evidence about SLCN

Real life speech, language and communication research helps us understand the impact of SLCN, the numbers of children and young people affected and how to provide the best support.

Expansive research to date tells us that **1.7 million** children and young people in the UK are affected by speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) with a smaller, yet very significant **7.6%** of the population of school children having Developmental Language Disorder (DLD).

Research demonstrates speech, language and communication skills as **fundamental to learning**, not just in literacy and English subjects, but across the whole curriculum, including maths and science and ultimately outcomes at GCSE and beyond.

Research shows good speech, language and communication skills are a **protective factor** for mental health, bullying and employment outcomes.

We now know the importance of **accurate early identification** of SLCN; the **interaction behaviours** of those supporting children and young people; and benefits of **well designed and evidenced support** programmes delivered in schools and settings.

1.7million

CHILDREN AND
YOUNG PEOPLE
IN THE UK ARE
AFFECTED BY SPEECH,
LANGUAGE AND
COMMUNICATION
NEEDS

Infant Language Link

We are excited to partner with The Education Endowment Foundation and Sheffield Hallam University, delivering a national study to investigate impacts of Infant Language Link in Year 1. The study takes place across the academic year 2023/2024 and we are looking for schools to take part.

Infant Language Link is an award-winning package enabling schools to identify and support children with SLCN. It encourages schools to develop a whole school approach to SLCN and provides activities for children with identified needs.

Schools will be allocated to either an intervention group or a control group.

Schools in the intervention group receive:

- 👍 Free training for 3 to 4 members of staff on implementing strategies and delivering speech and language interventions.
- 👍 Free Infant Language Link identification and intervention materials which can be used with all children in Years R, 1 and 2 for the duration of the project.
- 👍 Free access to our Help Desk and speech and language therapy advice for the duration of the project.
- 👍 Schools in the control group receive a financial reward for taking part.





The benefits of being involved in research

There are many benefits to schools participating in research. Your school will be adding to the evidence base of what works in education in England, helping drive forward reform and excellent practice.

Those in the intervention group will have access to Infant Language Link products enabling you to identify all children that have SLCN in Year 1, establishing whether a literacy or behaviour need is due to difficulties with language.

Those who are in the control group have the chance to top up their budget to increase opportunities for activities that support the whole school community.

Everyone taking part will be able to access knowledge more quickly to apply to your own teaching practice. Your knowledge, skills and experience will help children and education staff to be better supported in the future.

Being part of the research community brings its own benefits and develops understanding of how research works to support schools. It leads to knowledge and skills development for schools to build their own projects, looking at the impact that different teaching techniques or interventions have on the progress of students. Your knowledge, skills and experience will help children and education staff to be better supported in the future.

Raising awareness of your school's involvement in this programme will also help you to raise the profile of speech, language and communication across your whole school.

OFSTED also look very favourably on schools who undertake studies and recently supported schools taking part in EEF trials...

“IF YOU ARE TRYING OUT NEW MODELS AS PART OF EDUCATION ENDOWMENT FOUNDATION STUDIES OR ARE WORKING ON NEW APPROACHES TO CURRICULUM OR TEACHING OR ASSESSMENT, THAT WILL BE RECOGNISED”

AMANDA SPIELMAN, HM CHIEF INSPECTOR OF EDUCATION, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND SKILLS.

Criteria for schools

We are looking for schools that:

- Want to implement award winning speech and language interventions across year 1
- Will have 20+ year 1 pupils in September 2023
- Have not used Infant Language Link previously
- Will be able to deliver both class based and small group interventions for the year of the study

How do I get involved?

Visit our website at

speechandlanguage.info/study

to register your interest in taking part. You can also watch our video which will give you some more details about the Infant Language Link package or join one of our live webinars to hear more and ask any questions.



We are expecting interest to be high in this project. Schools wishing to take part will need to register by 19th May 2023.



Study 1: A Comparison of 'Business as Usual' and Secondary Language Link Intervention

Background

Secondary Language Link is an assessment and intervention package used by secondary schools to boost the language and communication skills of students in KS3. To assess the impact of Secondary Language Link for students in Year 7, we compared the progress of students from schools using the package with those from control schools providing their usual in-school SLCN support, or 'business as usual'.

The study took place from January to July 2022 in 13 schools across Kent and Essex that were all new to the Secondary Language Link package. These schools were randomly allocated to be either in the intervention group or the control group. Seven schools were randomly assigned to be control schools and the remaining 6 were intervention schools.

Method

After receiving webinar training, the intervention schools used the Secondary Language Link recommendations and interventions with all of their study pupils. Schools were asked to carry out two Year 7 intervention groups with the identified students between March and June 2022.

The intervention groups are video-led and immersive, designed to develop key areas of language and communication through group problem-solving activities. A session plan with detailed instructions, videos and resources is provided through the package. Sessions are completed once weekly for 45-50 minutes, with each group comprising of eight sessions.

The control schools provided their typical classroom and intervention support, or 'business as usual', for their study pupils.

Pupils in both sets of schools were assessed at the beginning and end of the study period using a range of recognised speech and language assessments by the research team. These were chosen to measure students' progress on the areas of language that were targeted by the intervention groups. To avoid any subconscious bias when completing the assessments, the research team did not know which groups the schools were in. There was no significant difference between the groups on any of the outcome measures at the start of the study.



Participants

Both sets of schools used the Secondary Language Link standardised assessment to identify students for the study. Students in Year 7 were included if they scored between the 6th to 16th percentile, indicating a mild-moderate language difficulty, or between the 16th and 24th percentile, indicating low average language ability. Students were not included in the study if they had a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or intellectual disability, or if they were developing English as an additional language (EAL).

The control schools identified 46 students for the study and the intervention schools identified 43. Unfortunately, three of the intervention schools did not complete the intervention groups in the way that was specified for the study, meaning that the data for their students was not included in the final analysis, leaving 22 intervention students.

Aims

The study aimed to investigate whether the students in Year 7 receiving Secondary Language Link intervention would make more progress with their language skills than the children in the control schools. This included their functional communication skills within the classroom as measured by student and teacher questionnaires.

At secondary school in particular, students with language difficulties are more likely to be noticed for challenging behaviour, poor academic progress or social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) difficulties. Therefore, the schools were asked to screen students presenting with challenging behaviour to see whether they would identify underlying, and previously hidden, language needs.

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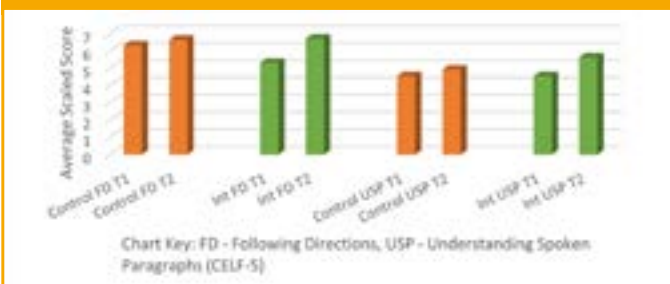


Results

Did the Language Link interventions make a difference to the students' language skills?

Students in the intervention group made significant progress with their ability to understand spoken instructions and directions ($p = .006$) and their ability to process spoken information in a short story and answer questions about it ($p = .036$). These were key areas of language targeted within the intervention groups. Students in the control schools did not make any significant improvement in these areas.

Average Scaled Score for Control and Intervention Groups from T1 to T2



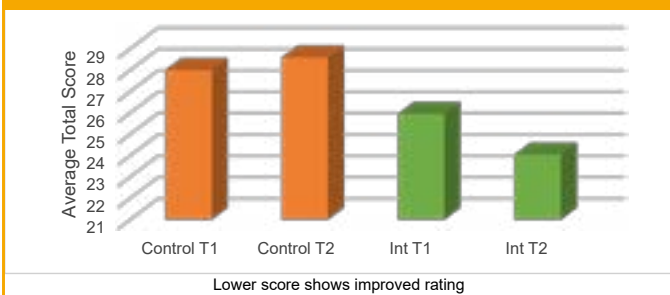
Did students receiving the intervention demonstrate an improvement in their functional skills within the classroom?

Class teachers who were able to observe the student using their communication skills in a lesson were asked to complete a questionnaire about them at the start and end of the study. The questionnaire required the teachers to rate the student's functional language and communication skills in the classroom, including their participation, ability to request clarification and ability to understand and follow instructions. Teachers for both the students in the intervention group and the control group rated the children significantly higher at the end of the study, however the effect size for the intervention group was higher ($d = 1.107$) than that for the control group ($d = .757$).

The students also completed a questionnaire at the start and end of the study, to rate their perceptions of their own communication skills in school. There was a significant difference between the intervention and control group students at the end of the study ($p = .001$) with the intervention students rating their functional communication skills more positively. For this questionnaire, lower scores indicated an improvement in functional communication skills.



Average Student Questionnaire Total Score for Control and Intervention Groups from T1 to T2



Were students with behavioural difficulties identified as having language difficulties?

Eight of the study schools responded to an evaluation questionnaire sent at the end of the study. Of these schools, seven had screened students that were presenting with challenging behaviour in school. These students were all identified by the assessment as having underlying language difficulties. The behaviours described by the schools ranged from work-avoidant behaviours, not engaging with class discussion or group work, to masking their difficulties, such as using negative behaviours to get sent out of class.

Conclusion

The students made positive progress with their understanding of language as a result of the intervention groups and questionnaires completed by their class teachers indicate a transfer of these skills functionally into the classroom. The students' own perceptions of their communication skills significantly improved following the intervention.

At secondary schools, students' language difficulties are likely to present as hidden, with challenging behaviour and reduced participation in the classroom more likely to be noticed by school staff. Secondary Language Link enables school staff to identify students' underlying language difficulties so support can be targeted where it is needed.

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Study 2: Boosting Talk Fitness with Secondary Language Link

Talk Fitness

The Secondary Language Link Talk Fitness intervention groups are designed to develop students' functional and cross-curricular speaking and listening skills. Level 1, designed for students in Year 7, focuses on three key areas of language and communication:

Active Listening – Supporting students to be more of an active participant within the classroom, including developing their ability to identify when they don't understand and to seek specific clarification.

Formal vs Informal Language – Developing an understanding of how and in what situations students should use more formal language (when talking to a teacher) and when to use informal language (when talking to friends), which students can often struggle with, leading to trouble.

Instructions – Developing students' ability to understand and follow instructions containing a range of concepts, and to be able to give clear instructions to others.

Aim of Study

This study set out to investigate the impact of the Talk Fitness Level 1 group intervention on the language and communication skills of students in Year 7. Between December 2020 and July 2021, three schools that were already using the Secondary Language Link package volunteered to take part in the study and complete the intervention with 33 Year 7 students.

Method

Each of the schools used the Secondary Language Link assessment to identify students with language needs that were suitable for the intervention. Students who were developing English as an Additional Language (EAL) were not included in the study.

The Secondary Language Link intervention groups each have a pre- and post-intervention Skills Check test. This is designed to measure the areas of language and communication targeted in the group. This test is completed with the students before and after the group to measure their progress. Teachers also completed a questionnaire to rate the students' functional language and communication skills within the classroom and each student completed a pupil self-assessment questionnaire to rate their own perceptions of their communication skills.

The schools completed the Level 1 Talk Fitness intervention with their study pupils. The intervention was completed over seven weeks, with sessions taking 45-50 minutes. All the interactive videos, session plans and materials are provided online through the package.

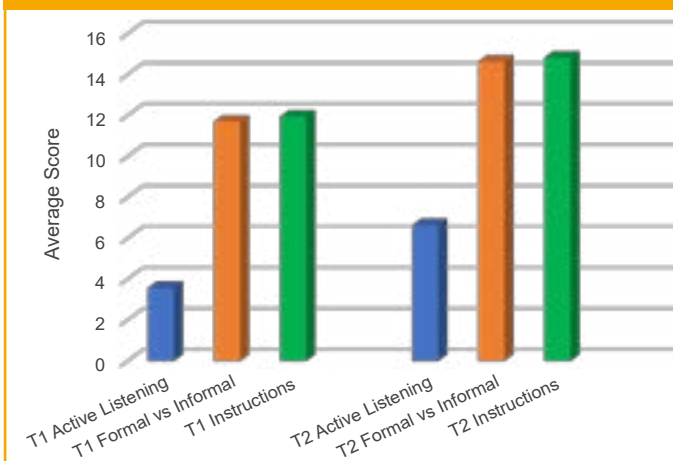
Following the intervention, the schools then completed the post-intervention Skills Check test, teacher questionnaire and pupil self-assessment questionnaire with each student to measure their progress.

Results

The results of the study were overwhelmingly positive. The students demonstrated significant progress on the Talk Fitness Skills Check test, which measured the areas of language and communication specifically targeted in the intervention sessions ($p < .001$). When broken down into the three key areas, the students' progress in each area was also found to be significant: active listening ($p < .001$), formal vs informal language ($p < .001$) and instructions ($p < .001$).



Average Scores on Talk Fitness Skills Check Test from T1 to T2



The students also demonstrated significant progress as measured by their own self-rating of their language and communication skills ($p < .001$), indicating that students felt their skills had improved following the intervention.

In addition, the teacher questionnaire indicated significant improvement ($p < .001$) of the student's functional language and communication skills within the classroom.

What did the schools think?

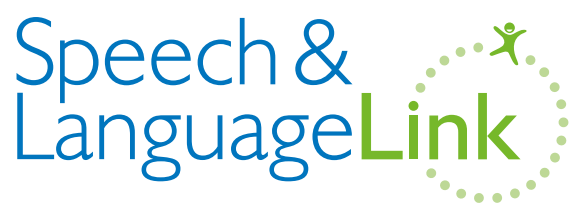
Feedback from the school reported that they felt:

"The lessons and activities were excellent. They provoked many interesting discussions and supported the students really well. Talk Fitness broke down some difficult concepts into points that were easy for my students to understand.

The students' ability to follow instructions definitely improved both in the session and in their classes. Most of the students gained confidence from talking in a small group during the sessions."

Conclusion

The Talk Fitness Level 1 intervention had a positive impact on the Year 7 students in the study. The students made significant progress across the language and communication areas targeted within the group, and teachers reported that they had started to demonstrate their new knowledge and skills functionally within the classroom.



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