



EYFS Speech, Language and Communication Strategy

Introduction

At the Whinless Down Academy Trust, we recognise that many of our children begin their early years journey with speech, language and communication skills that are below age related expectations. Research by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF, 2020) and Public Health England highlights that a significant proportion of children, particularly in areas of social disadvantage, start nursery or reception with limited vocabulary, reduced listening skills, and underdeveloped expressive language.

Studies show that early speech and language skills are closely linked to later outcomes in literacy, learning and emotional wellbeing. Children who struggle with communication in the early years are at greater risk of academic underachievement, social difficulties and lower self-esteem (Law et al., 2017). However, effective early intervention and a language-rich environment can significantly narrow this gap.

This strategy is built upon a three-tiered approach: universal, targeted, and personalised support. It is grounded in the EYFS statutory framework (2024), Development Matters, and best practice guidance.



Universal strategies for all children

We provide a strong communication friendly foundation for every child, recognising that all children benefit from a language-rich environment.

1. Language rich environment

Use of visual timetables, objects of reference, key word signs (e.g. Makaton), key word visuals using widget, labels and prompts to support understanding.

Consistent adult modelling of language during play, routines and transitions. Daily access to books, storytelling, singing and rhyme sessions to enhance vocabulary and phonological awareness.

An environment that is well labelled with both photos and visuals (e.g. widgets).

Routine songs are used to help queue children in to the routine and support transition times e.g. tidy up time song, goodbye song.

2. High quality interactions

EYFS staff are trained to use sustained shared thinking, commenting rather than questioning, and back and forth interactions.

Adults use the SHREC approach (EEF, 2020) to support child-led conversations (**S**hare attention, **R**espond, **E**xpand, **C**onversation)

Promoting turn-taking and attentive listening in circle time and small group activities.





3. Curriculum Integration

Communication and language explicitly embedded across all learning areas.

Play based activities designed to stimulate meaningful dialogue and imaginative role-play.

Provision is designed to give opportunities for children to initiate interaction with each other, developing speech, language and social communication skills.

4. Vocabulary development

Exposure to rich and varied vocabulary throughout the day

Drawing Club focus on vocabulary each week that is linked to the focus text. Actions are taught alongside to support acquisition.

The focus vocabulary is embedded throughout continuous provision and routines.

5. Language/speech Link assessment

All children are screened using Language Link on entry to the school. Concepts will be taught to groups of children, depending on the outcome of the assessment.

Speech Link assessments are completed on entry to the school, for any children who staff are concerned about their pronunciation of sounds.

Any child who comes out as red or blue in the initial Language Link assessment, will be reassessed every 6 months to track progress.

6. Nursery rhyme time and story time

Daily nursery rhyme and story time allows further opportunities for language development.

Repetition of key phrases supports language acquisition.



7. Communication boards in areas

The Early Years environment is well supported by communication boards across all areas of development, both inside and outside e.g. one in the water area with language related to that area.

Children and adults can use these when playing and learning in these areas, to support children's communication.

8. Curiosity cube

Every Early Years classroom, has a curiosity cube. This is a clear plastic cube, which is used to spark children's curiosity and encourage exploration and discussion. It's a tool that promotes observation, communication and sensory experiences, often related to a specific learning theme or topic.

7. Whole class language development

Stage 1 Attention Autism/bucket time is used as a whole class strategy in terms 1 and 2 to help develop listening and attention and language.

Identified children are then moved onto further stages in smaller groups.

Whole class language link lessons are also taught in Year R throughout the year, with a focus on the concepts generally not known or used well e.g. prepositions.



Targeted strategies **for identified children not making expected progress**

For children not yet working at age related expectations, we provide additional targeted support.

1. Early identification

Ongoing observation and assessment.

Clear referral pathway to SENCo and external services (e.g. Speech and Language Link Therapist - School balanced system).

Meetings with parents.

Nursery - ask parents to take children to Talking Walk In.

2. Small group Interventions

Evidence-based programmes such as Early Talk Boost (Nursery), NELI Language programme (Nursery), Language link groups (Year R).

Focused vocabulary teaching, story retelling, and language games to reinforce key concepts.

Phonics interventions which help children pronounce the sounds correctly.

Daily repetition and practice of target words and sentence structures.

Small group Attention Autism/bucket time for identified children, moving through the stages.

3. Adult led support

Staff provide scaffolded language support during targeted play, following any SALT advice given.

Use of sentence starters, modelling and rephrasing to extend children's utterances, in line with SHREC approach and Verve strategies.

Social stories may be used to support understanding and language.



4. Phonics interventions

Phonics interventions are completed with those children who have gaps in their phonics knowledge and skills. Those with speech, language and communication needs often fall behind in this area.

Precision teach focuses on their ability to recognise and say the sounds correctly.

Blending groups focus in their ability to blend the sounds to read the words.

5. SALT support

Speech link programmes may be used, following advice from the SALT Link Therapist.

Other strategies may be suggested through the balanced system. Individual communication board, with routine words and words linked to children's interests.

6. EAL (English as an additional language)

Some EAL have limited language on entry to the school. Most child make spontaneous progress with language acquisition as a result of the universal strategies in place. If progress does not happen, then extra support and investigations may need to happen.

7. Parental involvement

Concerns to be shared with parents by class teacher and/or SENCO.
Explanation of support to be given shared.



**If there is a child who is not making progress with SLCN
and requires targeted support:**

Year R

Complete a cause for concern sheet and send to SENCO.

Seek advice from SENCO/EYFS lead.

If children receive support for SLCN, add to provision map.

SENCO may ask for advice from SALT Link Therapist.

Added to SEN register.

Discuss at class review.

May access advice from STLS clinics.

Ensure to follow targeted level support.

Nursery

Ask parents to take them to the Talking Walk In session (give
TIWI handout)

If receive SALT support at clinic, support plan written.

Follow advice of SALT therapist.

Therapist may attend nursery.

Added to SEN register.

May complete CCCT referral, depending on children's needs.

Monitor TIWI attendance and ensure parents are reminded to
recontact TIWI after 3 months if there are still concerns.

May refer to PRG (Professional Resource Group) for further
advice and support.



Personalised Strategies

For children with complex needs

For children with complex needs or diagnosed speech, language and communication needs, we implement personalised plans in close collaboration with families and professionals.

1. Tailored individual support plans

Personalised plans (Year R) and support plans (Nursery) include specific, measurable language goals agreed with parents and specialists.

2. Specialist resources and approaches

Use of augmentative and alternative communication systems where appropriate.

Makaton signs consistently used by staff to support receptive and expressive language.

Communication boards, objects of reference, now and next and choice boards.

3. Total Communication Approach

Total communication approach - visuals, gesture, makaton, paper based communication aids.

We value and recognise any attempt at communication and will offer and accept a wide range of communication attempts.

Some children may not choose 'one' method of communication but use a variety, including eg pointing, looking, gabbling, gestalts etc all at one time.

4. Multi-agency collaboration

Regular liaison with SALT, Educational Psychologists, and other agencies. Therapists may deliver training or guidance to staff for effective intervention delivery.



5. Parental Involvement

Parent meetings and regular feedback on progress take place.

Home strategies shared to ensure consistency and generalisation of skills.

6. Identiplay

Identiplay is a strategy that can help children with social and communication differences learn 'play acts'. Identiplay is an approach that helps establish a shared focus. By doing this, it helps develop imitation skills, which in turn can develop into functional play. Using repeated play scripts, the approach promotes the development of social skills, understanding, imagination and exploration.

7. Intensive Interaction

Intensive Interaction is a practical approach used to develop communication and social skills in individuals, particularly those with learning disabilities or autism, who have difficulty with communication. It focuses on building fundamental communication skills by observing and responding to a person's actions and sounds as communication attempts. Any child who receives intensive interaction support regularly needs to have their sessions recorded on the intensive interaction paperwork.

8. Back and forth people games

Back and forth games, also known as serve and return games, are social interactions where players alternate taking turns, engaging in a continuous exchange of actions or words. These games help develop communication, social skills, and an understanding of turn-taking. The acronym of ROCK is encouraged when completing this strategy - **R**epeat, **O**ppportunity, **C**ue and **K**eeP the game going.



8. Curiosity programme

The curiosity programme, developed by Gina Davies, is a strategy designed to support children, particularly those with additional needs, in developing attention, language, and social communication skills. It focuses on fostering a love of learning through playful, interactive experiences and encourages positive interactions with others. The program emphasizes creating "irresistible invitations to learn" by engaging children's natural curiosity.

9. Gestalt Language Processing

Gestalt language processing (GLP) is a framework describing how some individuals, particularly children, learn and develop language. It suggests that instead of learning individual words first, they acquire language in "chunks" or phrases, called gestalts, which they later break down into smaller parts. This approach is often observed in children with ASD, but it's not exclusive to that group, and some children may use a mix of both analytic and gestalt language processing. In order to find out if a child is a Gestalt learner, an observation will be completed, in order to confirm and find out what stage the child is working at.



Impact on Children's Outcomes

Our tiered EYFS speech, language and communication strategy ensures that every child receives the right level of support at the right time. By embedding universal approaches, we raise the baseline for all learners. Targeted support ensures those at risk of delay are swiftly identified and helped to catch up, while personalised strategies enable children with complex needs to make progress in line with their potential.

As a result of our approach:

Children's expressive and receptive language improves across the EYFS.

Confidence, wellbeing, and engagement in learning increase.

More children meet the Early Learning Goal for Communication and Language.

Children are better prepared for transition to Key Stage 1, with improved readiness to learn, social interaction and literacy foundations.