

# **SPEECH, LANGUAGE & COMMUNICATION**

## Pocketbook

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Cartoons:  
Phil Hailstone

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## **Introduction to SLCN**

Defining SLCN, typical language development, who has SLCN?, prevalence, scale, how language works, language and literacy, why prioritise?, 5 things to remember

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# Who has SLCN?



Speech, language and communication difficulties affect a wide range of students. Some will have **delayed** language development, ie they will develop normally but more slowly than is typical. Others will have **disordered** language development. They may have a specific difficulty with one or more aspects of language.

- A pupil can have a specific speech, language or communication difficulty **without any other known disability**. Their cognitive and visual skills, and performance in physical or practical tasks may be within the average range
- For other pupils, SLCN may be **part of wider learning difficulties**. Those with moderate or severe learning difficulties, or with identified conditions such as Down's Syndrome, may struggle with many aspects of speech, language and communication
- Pupils with **Autistic Spectrum Conditions** (including Asperger syndrome) have particular difficulties with social communication skills and higher order language skills, such as inference and figurative language

## Who else has SLCN?



- Children with **physical difficulties**, including motor coordination and cleft palate, may have particular problems with speech. Those with hearing difficulties can also struggle with language development
- Pupils who have suffered head injuries following accidents or illnesses such as meningitis, which affect how the brain works, may have **acquired difficulties**. In these cases a range of complex speech, language and communication needs can arise and pupils are often referred to specialist teams
- Looked after children and those in areas where a high proportion of families live in poverty are at risk of **social disadvantage**. An impoverished language environment and/ or limited language interactions give rise to SLCN. Such pupils are often initially identified because of difficulties with attention and listening

## What about...?



Children with SLCN rarely fit neatly into boxes or text book descriptions. They often have overlapping difficulties or don't quite meet the criteria for a particular diagnosis. You may encounter SLCN in learners with selective talking, dyslexia and EAL.

**Selective talking (or selective mutism)** – students only talk in certain settings or with certain people.

**Dyslexia** – pupils may struggle with phonological awareness, early speech and vocabulary development, acquiring literacy, sequential memory and organisation.

**EAL** (English as an Additional Language) – EAL students who have difficulties in their first language, may also have SLCN in English.

Creating a language-friendly environment in your classroom will help all pupils, regardless of their 'label' and whether or not SLCN has been formally identified.

# What's the problem?



50-90% of children with persistent SLCN go on to have reading difficulties.  
**(Dockerell, J., Every Child A Talker Conference 2010)**

Two thirds of 7-14 year olds with serious behaviour problems had a language impairment.  
**(The Communication Trust, 2011)**

Studies show that between 55-100% of pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties have SLCN which has never been recognised.  
**(The Communication Trust, 2011)**

Only 25% of pupils with SLCN achieve the expected level in English at the end of Key Stage 2 and 15% of pupils with SLCN achieve 5 A\* – C GCSEs.  
**(from National Pupil Database quoted in Bercow Report, 2008)**

# What is the impact in school?



Language is the medium through which we teach content and skills; it is fundamental to learning and academic achievement. The most common ways of teaching and of assessing learning in schools are language based:

- Written tests and exams
- Written classwork, essays or homework
- Oral presentations
- Discussion and participation in class  
– either whole-class or group situations
- Listening to the teacher

Pupils with any aspect of SLCN will find it hard to show what they know. This will affect their academic achievement, participation, engagement and, ultimately, their confidence and self-esteem.



# It's not just academic



SLCN is now recognised as also having a significant impact on social, emotional and behavioural development.

**Social.** Pupils with SLCN often find it hard to build and maintain friendships and to interact appropriately. They may be isolated, withdrawn or socially inappropriate.

**Emotional.** The ability to reflect on our feelings and emotions is essential in developing a sense of self. Being able to talk to others about this helps us to develop emotionally. It is often hard for children with speech and language difficulties to understand their emotions and to develop a sense of identity.

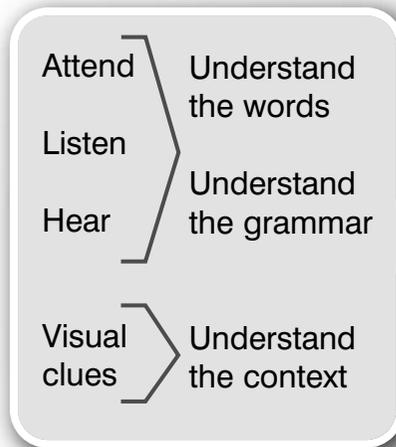
**Behavioural.** Learners with SLCN can find understanding and explaining events or incidents problematic. They sometimes get themselves or others into trouble for things they haven't done. If they see school as difficult or boring they are more likely to disengage or misbehave.

# How language works



Understanding and using language (both spoken and written) is a complex process:

## Receptive language

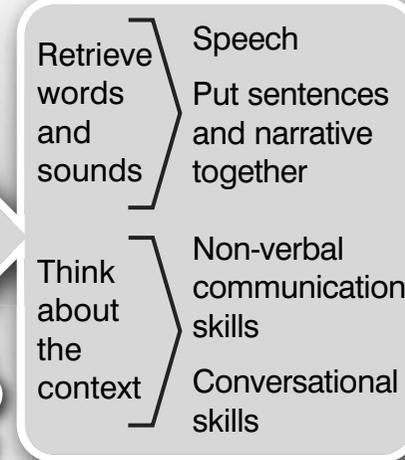


**INPUT**



**OUTPUT**

## Expressive language



Reading and writing add extra levels of processing at the input and output stages respectively.

*(Adapted from Hayden & Jordan, 2004 – see page 126)*

## About the Authors

**Victoria Mason**



Victoria began her career as a mainstream secondary school teacher and then worked as a teacher of SEN before specialising in SLCN. She currently works as a specialist teacher in a large mainstream secondary school's Language Unit, one of the few secondary Language Units in the country. She trains staff to meet the needs of pupils with SLCN in mainstream classrooms and provides specialist input for pupils with SLCN.

**Emela Milne**



Emela is a qualified speech and language therapist with over 25 years' experience working with children and young people with SLCN. She has worked with children with SLCN in clinics and health centres, as well as in nursery, primary and secondary school settings. She is a clinical supervisor for student speech and language therapists and delivers training and INSET for school staff working with pupils with SLCN. She is currently a speech and language therapist in three mainstream primary and secondary schools, all of which have specialist Language Units.