

Communication and Dysphagia Pathways in Special Schools

Children's
Speech &
Language
Therapy



This leaflet sets out how the **Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) team** will **support children's communication** and **dysphagia needs** in Special Schools. It details the **universal supports** that special schools should offer learners consistently across the day. The Speech and Language Therapy team will support with **assessment** and **implementation** of more personalised interventions. Before **referral** to the Speech and Language Therapy team, the school will ensure **all appropriate universal supports** are being **implemented** according to the child's **communication needs**. Children may not always be on an active SLT caseload but their communication and dysphagia needs will still be met by the **skilled staff** in a special school setting.

Communication

What should be universally available?	What does this mean?
Intensive interaction	An approach used to support communication and interaction. Adults should follow the child's lead, join in with them and playfully imitate.
Makaton signing	Use this alongside spoken language to support understanding and provide a further means of communicating.
Choice making using photos and symbols	Learners should be offered choices using photos and symbols at regular opportunities.
Objects of reference	Objects of reference should be used to symbolise activities/places.
Visual timetable	Learners should be supported with their understanding of the structure of the day through the use of visual timetables and photos for transition.
Now and Next / First and Then	Learners should be supported with their understanding of the structure of the day through the use of a now-next or first-then board.
Language-rich environment	Adults should provide clear language models throughout the day, tailored to the language levels of the child.
Modelling of communication supports and language	Adults should model appropriate communication strategies. For example, simple language, signing, core boards, communication books or communication devices. A Total Communication approach should be used.
Paired and small group work on communication strategies with school staff member	Learners should be offered regular opportunities to practise their skills in paired and small group work sessions.

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Social stories	Social stories should be used to provide descriptions of a particular situation, event or activity, including information about what to expect in that situation and why.
Identiplay	A parallel play approach working to establish a shared focus, developing imitation skills and the learner's confidence in play and interaction.
Curiosity Programme	Learners should be offered opportunities to access Curiosity Programme activities which are fun activities intended to develop curiosity, communication and interaction. It includes intensive interaction, using signature sequences (adding rhymes and songs to daily activities), creating opportunities to explore and playing together.
Bucket time sessions	Learners should have regular Bucket Time sessions, working through stages as appropriate to the learner. The aims of bucket sessions are to engage attention, develop joint attention and shared attention in a group, as well as encourage spontaneous interaction in fun, motivating activities.
Phonological awareness activities	Learners should be offered regular opportunities to practise their phonological awareness skills and practise speech sounds.
Core boards	Learners should have core boards available to them at all times throughout the day and staff should consistently model on these.
Topic boards / pointing boards	Topic or pointing boards contain vocabulary that may be more personal to a learner and their interests. They should be used alongside core boards.
Gestalt Language Processing	Staff should be familiar with the different stages of Gestalt Language Processing and should offer natural language learning opportunities to the learners at their appropriate level.

The above strategies are familiar to teaching staff in Special schools and part of their ordinarily available provision. Staff can access training resources to support their understanding and use of classroom communication skills. Training is provided through Speech and Language Therapy online training resources and the Local Authority SEND offer.

Provide Community also offers a Special Schools training package for staff at special schools to access.

Staff should ensure learners have consistent access to the strategies described above. Consistency in these areas will support with learners understanding of the day and support their communication.

Staff can speak to the SLT team if there is a need for further support once all of these strategies are being implemented. The SLT team can provide advice and discuss if a referral is needed.

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When will the SLT team be involved and what do they do?



The SLT team will assess and set communication targets and interventions. This may include direct intervention with the SLT, coaching staff with specific AAC or therapy delivery.

Targeted

The SLT team will assess and set communication targets and interventions. This may include modelling and supervision for staff to deliver interventions, or trialling of personalised approaches.

Universal

The SLT team contributes to the training and awareness of supports, and the school is responsible for setting and delivering targets and strategies for communication. No input to individual children is needed from SLT and children requiring universal support for their communication are discharged from the active caseload. SLT is available to discuss with staff and parents when referral may be required.



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Dysphagia

Dysphagia Specialist

A referral for a child to a Dysphagia Specialist will be accepted if the child presents with one or more of the following:

- ➔ Difficulties with chewing and/or swallowing.
- ➔ Reluctant eaters as a result of a physical or health difficulty.
- ➔ Difficulties with sensation or gastric difficulties such as vomiting/reflux.

Please note, children with behavioural feeding difficulties of a non-organic cause, such as a sensory aversion, do not meet the criteria for this service.

All staff in the special school should have completed training and a questionnaire to be able to support learners with dysphagia.

A child will be discharged from the speech and language therapy feeding service if:

- ➔ Eating and drinking skills are within normal limits.
- ➔ Safe, functional, and developmentally appropriate eating and drinking skills are established and maintained.
- ➔ Eating and drinking difficulties are stable and strategies in place are established and effective in managing risk over prolonged period of time.
- ➔ An individual moves to receiving all nutrition via enteral means (tube feeding via the nose, stomach or bowel) and transition to any oral intake is not currently anticipated.
- ➔ Individuals whose coexisting medical conditions or physical health symptoms are the primary cause of current restricted food intake and Speech and Language Therapy is not effecting change at this time.
- ➔ Eating and drinking difficulties are no longer physical in nature but rather behavioural/sensory related and of non-organic origin and not due to another health condition.

Contact

For further information, contact

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