

The Communication Trust and Achievement for All: Building a joined-up offering for SEND

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Marking collaboration between Achievement for All and the Communication Trust, this paper explores the links between approaches to addressing the needs of pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and those who struggle with speech, language and communication.

Entering the brave new world

For children, parents and educational professionals, the world of new school policy and budget cuts that we are entering is a terrifying one, although it is also rich with opportunity. Our combined task is to focus minds, through partnership, on the positive aspects of this “brave new world”, so that the gains of recent years are multiplied, rather than lost, particularly for pupils who face additional barriers to their progress.

The Communication Trust (TCT), a coalition of nearly 50 charities focusing on children’s speech, language and communication and Achievement for All 3As (AfA), a new charity based on the unprecedented success of the Achievement for All pilot in 450 schools, are setting new standards in collaboration. Many pupils identified with SEND have speech, language and communication needs as a primary need or as an integral element of their learning needs, recognising a significant overlap between their target groups, TCT and AfA are working together to make the offer for pupils identified with SEND clearer for schools and parents and more effective and efficient through joint working.

There are many areas of debate between professionals – about levels and type of support for children with different impairments, what works best, concerns over labelling of SEND, worries about under-identification of needs, whether a generalist approach can achieve results, whether a specialist approach is too narrow. In a time of major systems churn, nationally and locally, across education and health, against a backdrop of austerity the danger is that these debates and competition for resources push us into fragmented and competitive positions.

And yet this is also a great moment of opportunity. Never before has there been such a focus and commitment to raising the profile of SEND within the education system. Never before has educational underachievement been so high on the agenda. Never before have head teachers had so much autonomy to determine, fund and implement within their schools the solutions they see fit for the most vulnerable learners.

The new OFSTED Inspection Framework adds additional incentive. Outstanding school judgements are reserved for schools *where pupils with SEND make rapid and sustained progress and that the gap in attainment is closing rapidly with a wide range of performance indicators*. And, for the first time,

this progress must be in communication as well as in literacy and numeracy – a significant step forward for those campaigning for the importance of speech, language and communication skills.

Which children are we trying to help?

Despite their different foci AfA and TCT have a massive overlap in the children they seek to support.

AfA primarily focuses on pupils identified with SEND; the framework can also be applied to a wider range of vulnerable pupils including those on free school meals (FSM), those with low-attainment, and others. However, more often than not these characteristics coincide. For example just 7% of pupils with a statement of SEND achieve 5 A*-C at GCSE or equivalent, including English and mathematics. This compares to 66% for pupils with no identified SEND. Around 30% of those with SEND are eligible for Free School Meals (FSM). These pupils are primarily characterised by a lack of the three most important ingredients in education: aspiration, access and achievement. Because of this, there are strategies that apply to all schools in supporting them. The importance of school leadership, whole school evaluation workforce development, involvement of parents, raising aspirations, making best use of available data and accessing timely specialist support have all been shown to improve outcomes.

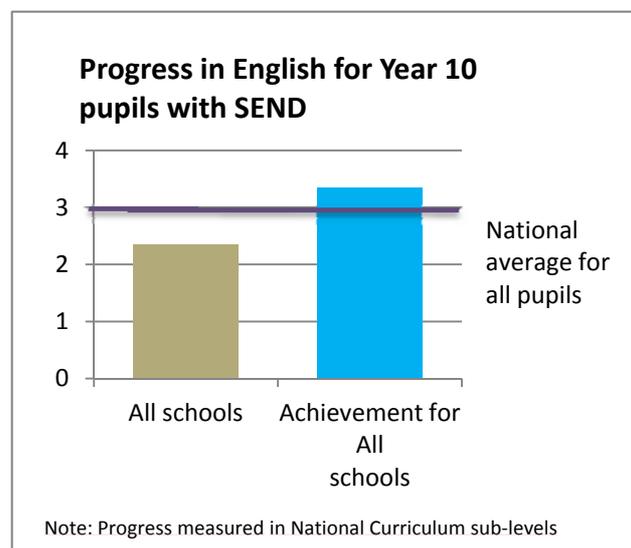
Most of these pupils also fall within ambit of The Communication Trust. Of the 21% of children who are identified as having SEND, 28% at the primary level have Speech Language Communication Needs (SCLN) as their primary need. In secondary schools, this figure is just over 8%. In addition, we know that the majority of children with SEND have SLCN as a secondary need. Many of these children have impairments that mean they will require additional support for their entire school career. However if their needs are effectively met, through strong quality first teaching, targeted interventions or specialist support, most of them will make progress and any gaps in attainment can be narrowed.

In some parts of the country, with clear links to poverty, over half of children are entering school with significant language delay up to 18 months behind expected levels. We also know from project work in this area that there can be under identification of these children and focus on impact of these difficulties, such as literacy or behaviour, rather than the primary underlying language need. Teachers have commented on their desire for training, strategies and effective tools to support the effective identification of these children.

How can we support them most effectively?

Achievement for All is now being rolled out nationally by the charity Achievement for All (3As), with funding from DfE and business support from PricewaterhouseCoopers as a not-for-profit programme, which schools purchase at less than half of cost. The programme aims to reach a quarter of all schools in England within 3 years.

Achievement for All is a common framework which defines the most important elements of provision for pupils with SEND. Schools use this framework to develop a bespoke programme that takes



into account their own strengths and opportunities, building on existing practice and accessing additional support where needed.

Every school has been shown able to improve its provision, by developing a plan along the four elements of the framework:

- Developing school leadership;
- Ensuring that teachers are rigorous in setting stretching targets and tracking students against them;
- Involving parents in the learning journey through structured conversations; and
- Ensuring wider outcomes by engaging children in school.

A pilot of the Achievement for All framework in over 450 schools over the last two years showed staggering results for this generalist approach. Most impressively, pupils with SEND in AfA schools progressed on faster than the national average for all pupils. Although this was not the case for the children with the very lowest ability, it has called into question the often unchallenged notion that children with SEND can never catch up with their peer group. In addition, there was significantly improved behaviour, fewer exclusions, and a 10% drop in persistent absenteeism. In recognition of the huge progress made during the pilot, the Achievement for All framework was written into the government's Green Paper on SEND, and the elements of the framework have been referenced in the new Ofsted framework.

The Communication Trust also believe in a whole school model with a focus on workforce development, leadership, parents and appropriate interventions at all levels to support children with speech, language and communication needs working directly and in collaboration with partners its work has also been written into the Green Paper Framework. Whole school approaches are an explicit part of the Communication Trust's school strategy and many members apply whole school frameworks. I CAN's Talk model for example is in over 100 schools and has been show to improve engagement in learning, speech and language skills and to boost literacy and other curriculum attainment.

Both AfA and TCT models display the characteristics of effective school improvement programmes – robust needs analysis, a strong focus on leadership, involvement of parents and pupils and clarity over groups that need additional support making best use of available data from multiple sources. For children with SLCN in particular, workforce development to support early identification is paramount and is a crucial element of these approaches.

The Trust and Achievement for All are now working together to explore how their approaches can best work alongside each other to create an even stronger model of support with a particular focus on further improving outcomes for children with SLCN. With over 24,000 schools across England, the combined reach of Achievement for All and the Communication Trust's networks will be essential to take the best support to schools.

Within generalist whole school approaches some children will need additional support. There are 1,449,685 children at school action and school action plus that may need WAVE 2 (targeted) and / or WAVE 3 interventions. Elklan's Speech and Language Support for 5-11s and 11-16s and their Communication Counts model supports schools' capacity to target strategies to children with SLCN at waves 2 & 3. In addition to these, after only 9-10 months of implementation, I CAN's Secondary Talk programme has a significant impact on school staff knowledge, teaching practice and schools'

approaches to understanding and supporting pupils' language and communication development. Pupils perceived that teachers were significantly easier to understand after they had engaged in *Secondary Talk*.

A significant number of children would also benefit from The Communication Trust's 'Talk Boost' intervention, developed with I CAN and Every Child a Chance Trust. It is aimed at improving speech and language outcomes in children with language delay. At Reception and KS1 this intervention showed on average that the children who took part progressed by 18 months following the 10-week intervention

More than the sum of our parts

With so many evidence-based approaches for schools to choose from, there is a real danger that without collaboration, there may be confusion for schools and much good work will be lost. Conversely, there is great power in combining forces to strengthen each offering using the resources and expertise of the other. In this way there can be a more systematic approach to ensuring children get the right support and that this support is delivered to the highest quality. Working together, AfA and The Communication Trust will be more than the sum of its parts.

There are many ways in which this will work. Through its network of coaches, AfA is already in hundreds of schools across dozens of Local Authorities, debating the issues for learners with SEND with school leaders on a regular basis. By signposting these schools towards the most appropriate interventions for the profile of their children, AfA can support Communication Trust members to ensure they create the impact they have the potential to achieve. Equally, the coaches who deliver the AfA framework can be trained and licensed to deliver targeted interventions to support SLCN to the schools they support. Work has already started on shared approaches and there is a huge potential for intellectual property to be created, by comparing notes, sharing data and building on what is happening in the field and therefore improving outcomes for a wide range of learners with SEND and others.

These are just some examples of this positive direction of travel. The joined-up approach, based on partnership and collaborative working across the sector, is increasingly being seen as the leading response from educational professionals to the challenging world that pupils and their parents face. It will be an important contribution to ensuring that all children, not just the most fortunate, are able to aspire to, access and achieve the world class learning they deserve.

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