

# Early Years

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It is particularly important in the early years that there is no delay in making any necessary special educational provision.<sup>1</sup>

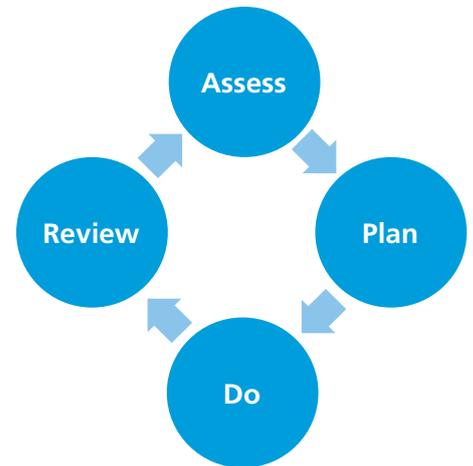
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## What does the Code say<sup>2</sup>?



The general principles contained within the code are that:

- When a child is identified as having Special Educational Needs (SEN), settings should take action to remove barriers to learning and put effective special educational provision in place.
- This SEN support should take the form of a four-part cycle of: assess-plan-do-review. This is known as “the graduated approach” and replaces school action and school action plus, early years action and early years action plus categories. All settings should adopt this approach.
- Provision should be **needs-led**



Specifically for **early years**, the Code of Practice calls for:

- All early years’ providers to have arrangements in place to support children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). These arrangements should include a clear approach to identifying and responding to SEN.
- Early years providers **must** provide information for parents on how they support children with SEN and disabilities and they should regularly review and evaluate the quality and breadth of the support they offer or can access for children with SEND.
- Parents need to be informed if special educational provision is being made for a child
- When a child is aged between two and three, early years practitioners must review progress, including speech, language and communication development and share this with parents. The review must identify strengths and areas for concern.
- All those who work with young children should be alert to emerging difficulties and respond early. In particular, parents know their children best and it is important that all practitioners listen and understand when parents express concerns about their child’s development. They should also listen to and address any concerns raised by children themselves.

The Code of Practice is clear about the need for **early identification** of SEN as best practice:<sup>3</sup>

- The benefits of early identification are widely recognised – identifying need at the earliest point, and then making effective provision, improves long-term outcomes for children.
- Children with more complex developmental and sensory needs may be identified at birth. Health assessments such as the hearing screening test, which is used to check the hearing of all new-born babies, enable the very early identification of a range of medical and physical difficulties. Health services, including paediatricians, the family's GP and Health Visitors, should work with the family, support them to understand their child's needs and help them access early support.



## What are the Key Issues for SLCN?

- There are substantial challenges for the children's workforce in terms of: being able to identify Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN); knowing how to provide optimal universal support for speech, language and communication; as well as being skilful in involving children with SLCN and their parents within the graduated approach.
- There may be issues in accessing support from other agencies and services, in terms of identifying and supporting SLCN, as well as in accessing training and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) support.
- Practitioners need to be aware of their own role in identifying and supporting SLCN, and build up confidence in doing this.
- Practitioners and settings need to have skills in evaluating progress and know what good and expected progress looks like for children with SLCN.
- Settings may not be fully aware of what constitutes a communication supportive environment, yet this forms the foundation on which to build additional support for children with SLCN.
- There may be a lack of confidence in recognising, planning and delivering appropriate interventions for different SLCN.

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### Research snapshot...

- The importance of language in the early years is well-evidenced.
  - Language development at 2 years can often predict children's performance on entry to primary school<sup>4</sup> and is also linked to outcomes into adulthood.<sup>5</sup>
  - Children with poor language skills at 5 years are at substantial risk of low achievement at 7 years and beyond.<sup>6</sup>
  - Narrative skills at 3-6 years are a powerful predictor of literacy skill at 8-12 years.<sup>7</sup>
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### Identifying SLCN in the early years

- Identification of children with SLCN is crucial, yet often complex and we know that many are being missed in the early years.
- The early years workforce therefore has a vital role in identifying SLCN early, but some practitioners may not have accessed training, resources or support to be able to do this accurately.
- The early years are often the point of identification or diagnosis for many children with SLCN which marks a time of huge anxiety for parents in many cases. Early years workers in pre-schools, children's centres, childminders and Health Visitors, play a key role in supporting parents at this time, and signposting to specialist services.
- Up to 50% of children in areas of social disadvantage are likely to have delayed language as they enter school.<sup>8</sup>

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#### *Research snapshot...*

Research shows that early years practitioners may only accurately identify 50% of children with SLCN. Parent reports and practitioner views are not enough, and children are often missed.<sup>9</sup>

Over 60% of early years teachers reported they lacked confidence in their ability to meet children's language needs.<sup>10</sup>

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#### *A little bit more about...*

**Delayed speech, language and communication** occur across all socio-economic groups; however there is a strong association with social disadvantage. In some areas, the scale of delays can raise particular challenges for effective identification.

Because the language levels of so many children are lower than those we would typically expect, practitioners and settings may underestimate the incidence of language delay purely because it is so common in their setting. Practitioners' expectations of what good language development looks like can shift to a much lower level and inadvertently set too low a benchmark for expected language development.

This makes identification difficult, as practitioners compare children within their setting rather than against typical developmental norms.

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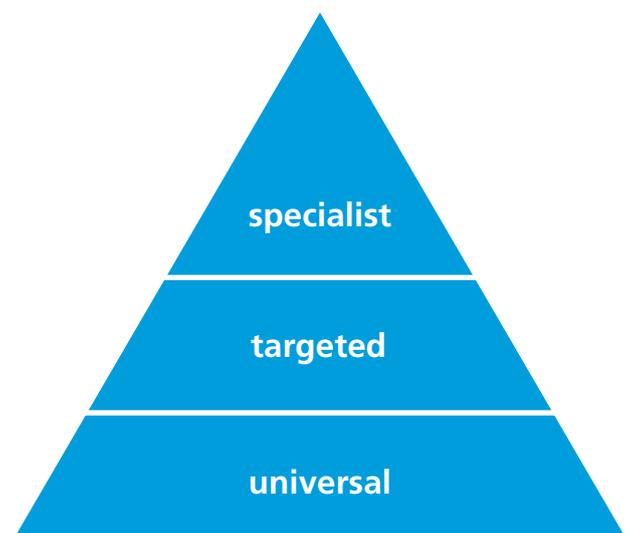
## *What are the Key Strategies for SLCN?*

Describing support for SLCN using the terms ‘universal’, ‘targeted’ and ‘specialist’ has become common over recent years. These terms were used, for example, to identify different evidenced approaches to supporting SLCN as part of the Better Communication Research Programme.<sup>17</sup> However, how these terms are used or represented in different areas may vary in practice.

Here, when we talk about universal support, we mean the support that should be available to **all** children to promote speech, language and communication development; and to enable effective early identification of children who may be struggling.

We use targeted support to describe additional or different support or intervention for children who are struggling with elements of speech, language and/or communication; this may be individual or group support.

The specialist level includes individualised assessment, intervention and support from specialist practitioners such as Speech and Language Therapists in order for the child to make progress.



- **It's important that good universal support for speech, language and communication is in place.** Research shows that it is the quality of adult-talk that affects children's participation and interaction and embedding this within an appropriate curriculum is important.
- **It is very important to understand your roles and responsibilities** in relation to identifying and supporting SLCN in young children.
- **Ensure you're confident and can effectively gain the views of young children** and their parents. There's some more information on this in the sections on children and young people at the centre and engaging with parents.
- Make sure you're clear on **the process of undertaking further assessment and gaining support** for young children with SLCN, as this will vary across settings.
- **Develop effective ways of working with other professionals** such as Speech and Language Therapists. Is there training you can access for example?
- To help with identification, it may be useful for your setting to develop a **profile in terms of what numbers of SLCN would be expected here.**
- **Develop ways of engaging with parents to support their child.** During this time parents may require additional support because of anxiety around the identification of needs, and to support the child with transitions (into nursery/school for example).
- **Develop systems** to support transitions and to share information, particularly on speech, language and communication between practitioners, e.g. Health Visitor to early years staff; early years staff to reception teacher. Admissions meetings to enable this, and for parents to share what works for their child are very helpful.
- **Ensure you are able to put into place approaches to monitor and track the progress** of children with SLCN. They may need progress, particularly in areas they find most difficult, to be broken down into much smaller steps.
- **Use good practice in relation to child-centred outcomes.** Studies have shown that even very young children can be involved in saying what is important to them (See the section on Developing Outcomes).

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#### *For example...*

If we know from research that 5-7% of children are likely to have specific difficulties with language and communication. Is this what you are seeing?

In an area of social disadvantage the number is likely to be much higher, and could be up to 50% of the intake having delayed speech and language skills. How are you currently identifying these needs?

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## What does success look like?



Within our setting:

- We know how to identify numbers of children with SLCN in our area.
- We have good systems in place to monitor progress, and clear intervention programmes linked to this.
- We have practitioners with a sound knowledge of speech, language and communication development.
- We've identified any workforce development needs and have good ongoing professional development plans in place around SLCN.
- We know how to access specialist support, and utilise this effectively.
- We engage with parents effectively to support language development in the home setting.
- We have good systems in place around transitions, to support children moving into nursery or into school well.



## References



1. Code of Practice 5.36
2. Code of Practice 6.44: 5.2:5.6:5.38
3. Code of practice chapter 5: 5.4, 5.14
4. Roulstone et al (2011), *Investigating the role of language in children's early educational outcomes research report* DfE – RR134
5. Hartshorne M (2006), *The Cost to the Nation*, ICAN
6. Fernstein A & Duckworth K (2006), *Development in the early years: It's importance for school performance and adult outcomes*. <http://eprints.ioe.ac.uk/5970/1/Fernstein2006Development.pdf>
7. Wellman et al (2011,) *Narrative Ability of Children with Speech Sound Disorders and the Prediction of Later Literacy Skills* LSHSS Vol 42
8. The Communication Trust *A Generation Adrift*, (Jan 2013) P14
9. C4EO *Grasping the Nettle: Early Intervention for children, families and communities*
10. Lee, W & Wagg, E (2012), *Talk of the Town evaluation report*
11. J Law, W Lee, S Roulstone, Y Wren, B Zeng & G Lindsay (2012), "What works"; *Interventions for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs*, Better Communication Research Programme, p21



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The Communication Trust has an area dedicated to Early Years where you can find links to Early Years resources as well as free resources to help you understand and implement the Code of Practice.

You can find them at:

[www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/early-years](http://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/early-years)

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There is a wide range of other guidance available to help practitioners deliver the Reforms which Communicating the Code seeks to add to rather than duplicate. Follow [this link](#) to find additional resources and support and [this link](#) to see examples of good practice and case studies relating to the Code of Practice.

This document can also be downloaded from our website at [www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk](http://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk)

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