

Spring 2024



At a glance



- Foreword by the EYSLCN Team
- Spotlight on our universal offer
- Targeted Support for under 2's, 2 to 3 and 3- to 4-year-olds
- WellComm
- Library Corner
- Eden Bear Recommends...
- Over to you...

Next Cluster Meeting

Wednesday 28th February at 13.30-15.00

LINK at the end of the newsletter



Welcome Everyone to the Spring term 2024 when we can now look forward to the days becoming longer and lighter as we battle through the wintry weather towards the promise of Spring.

Last term (Autumn 2023), Ofsted released their new research review of the prime areas of learning. [Giving all children the best start in life - Ofsted: early years \(blog.gov.uk\)](https://www.blog.gov.uk/2023/11/22/giving-all-children-the-best-start-in-life-ofsted-early-years/)

We all know that there continues to be concern both locally and nationally around the development of language and communication. Therefore, our roles as Early Years practitioners and teachers remain as important as ever. For this term's foreword the focus is on "talk".

Talk has been widely recognised for years as beneficial in the development of literacy skills:

"Reading and writing float on a sea of talk." "Professor James Britton, educator."

Key research projects such as the Snowling Review in 2011 have all highlighted the acquisition of language as a crucial element in learning and as a key predictor of future educational achievement. The research projects also identified the importance of adults in modelling the use of chosen words and phrases in supporting language development. A Report for the Education Endowment Foundation on Early Language Development found that:

"...there is evidence that the rate at which children develop language is sensitive to the amount of input they receive from the adults around them. The quality of input that children receive is likely to be more important than the quantity."

"Putting words together may be a better predictor of later abilities than the number of words that a child uses."

As Early Years practitioners and teachers we know there are many other gains too. We are well aware that effective communication is built on close, strong relationships – relationships that nurture a sense of value and security in young children and help to build good levels of well-being that are also vital to the learning process.

The ability to interact sensitively and appropriately, supporting and extending learning is a complex process built on a deep understanding of how young children learn and our knowledge of each unique child.

As Julie Fisher (Independent Early Years Adviser and Visiting Professor, Oxford Brookes University) puts it:

"In order to capitalise on the power of language to influence both thought and action, (classroom) experiences must encourage talk as a key process through which young children learn."



We very much hope you enjoy this edition of our newsletter and we very much look forward to welcoming as many of you as possible at our Spring 2024 cluster meeting – details in this newsletter.

As always, we very much welcome your feedback in relation to our newsletter and any thoughts or suggestions or themes for future newsletters.

We do hope you all have a happy and enjoyable Spring term.

Best wishes from the EYs SLCN Team.

Universal support

Our Autumn term cluster focused on the universal support we can provide to all children. Louise Rylance talked us through the points below:

Adult interactions – what do you need to consider?

- Are you/your team confident in your knowledge of typical speech, language and communication development?
- Are you confident to identify those children needing targeted or specialist support?
- Are you confident that good practice is used across the setting to best promote language and communication for all children?
- Do you support parents and families to promote language and communication at home?

Activities and resources – what do you need to consider?

- Are opportunities for communication built into all activities?
- Do your activities and resources provide a variety of vocabulary at the right stage for each child?
- Do children in your setting have 'reason' to communicate throughout the day?

Physical environment– what do you need to consider?

- Do you regularly observe how the children are communicating in the space? Note the places where most or least communicating happens – why is this?
- Consider physical factors such as layout, light, and space –what impact does this have on how the children interact?
- Think about noise levels – children are much less able to 'tune out' background noise.
- Is visual information available to support spoken language, e.g., symbols for labels, timetables, now/next, Makaton signs etc.

Language Leads shared the universal strategies that they use:

After modelling language give children time to process and respond.

During day to day interaction I like to ask questions and model answers especially with tricky how and why questions.
"Why can't I eat your lunch..... "ah because it's yours and I need to eat mine"

Trying to always use open ended questions all day every day not yes and no.

We use a lot of first and then language to support our younger ones through routine change as well as asking questions about their play.

We also have an 'Our families' book which we encourage parents to e-mail photos in which we share, also if a child doesn't have photos sent we put some taken in the setting.

We have key worker group snack time and we find this is a good opportunity for all children to talk about their morning. Song of the week and Makaton sign of the week.

Walk and talk moments with parents so we are modelling language whilst out and about outdoors.

During storytime we always pick out certain words and discuss as a group.

Our home learning challenges often include a circle time which encourages the children to talk about what they have brought in. This is a great way of getting the children engaged as it is something they have sourced. We often do this in a small group with mixed abilities.

We have seen great response from parents using walk and talk activities as home challenges. We set a challenge in the foyer and encourage them to share their outings via parentzone and emailing photos and the children can share these at together times and the photos can be displayed in the foyer to encourage other parents to take part.

We look at vocab in books and questions related to stories.

We have Elmer to take home in Pre-school and Everywhere Bear in Reception class and when they return the book with Elmer/Everywhere Bear the children talk about their adventures together.

We do focus sheets that parents fill in and send pictures in what they did over the weekend for the child to share with other children. Children love this.

We provide stay and play, library trips and walk and talk with our parents.

We do core books and teach makaton signs.

We make sure in provision we have objects of reference, choice boards and now and next boards available and ready for the children to use, all staff are aware of children needing these.

We use makaton signs and also during some songs. Use song bag with visuals for children who have difficulties with communicating.

Anya Hopkinson highlighted talk techniques we can use:

Talking together Being equal partners in communication	Attention and listening Supporting a child's understanding of language and activities	Level of language Adapting adult language to fit the child's level	Keep on commenting Reinforcing and extending a child's language development
How?	How?	How?	How?
Listen more than you talk	Remove distractions	Keep language simple	Comment on what is happening
Involve children in conversation	Look at the child you are talking to	Give one instruction at a time	Give children the right language model
Use visual cues	Say the child's name	Check understanding	Repeat language
Emphasise turn taking	Keep to a routine	Re-phrase information	Wait!
Value what children say	Praise good listening and attention skills		

Our Spring term cluster will be focused on targeted support. The following three articles provide targeted strategies to use.

Targeted support

- Notice babies' response to different types of stimuli e.g. visual, auditory, tactile
- Identify activities or objects which are highly motivating
- Use objects of reference to support understanding e.g. nappy, cup, coat
- Share concerns with parents and offer additional advice and guidance
- Continue to support spoken language with objects, gestures, signs
- Encourage and support all attempts at communication
- Gather detailed observations of preferred methods of communication for possible referral to specialist services

When looking at targeted support/activities within your setting, consider who might benefit from the support and how you can differentiate to cater to the needs of different children. This might mean you can use one activity for a few children or even all the children.

-Notice babies' response to different types of stimuli e.g. visual, auditory, tactile.

-Gather detailed observations of preferred methods of communication for possible referral to specialist services.

Activity idea:

Song time-

Use props to support association between the object and the song.

Introduce singing time with a welcome song and an ending song.

Offer musical instruments.

Observations:

To note responses. What do they like/dislike and how do you know?

Remember- note non-verbal communication, including stilling, smiling, movement etc.

-Identify activities or objects which are highly motivating.

-Encourage and support all attempts at communication.

-Continue to support spoken language with objects, gestures, signs.

Activity:

Curiosity box/bag.

Set time aside to explore items in the Curiosity box. Ideas for your box- Car, bubbles, Light toys, windmills, spinning tops, cup, or just items that you can encourage them to explore the texture, smell, weight, sound.

Use gestures or signs as well as words to label.

Sing a song to introduce the activity. This must be consistent each time you do this activity as it helps them to develop an association with the song and what is happening next.

Allow time to explore and use commenting as your main strategy.

Observations:

Noting responses to different stimuli.

Note attempts to copy or imitate.

Record any communicative attempts, including non-verbal- looking towards, reaching towards, vocalisations

Interpret what you think the child is communicating.

-Share concerns with parents and offer additional advice and guidance.

Plan and make time with parents to feedback your observations and assessments and to allow parents to feedback their concerns and or thoughts.

Share with parents what you are working on now and offer ideas for them to work on at home, which may replicate what you are doing at nursery- you could give them a curiosity box or ask them to make their own.

Offer to have a parent session where you encourage parents to come and make their own curiosity box and to watch a short session being modelled.

Signpost to appropriate resources for example 'BBC Tiny Happy People', 'Toddler club'

Encourage parents to leave feedback on how they have got on.

**Empowering
Parents**



**Working
together.**



**Observe, Wait and
Listen**



- For more reluctant talkers, create opportunities to talk using a sabotage approach. For example if the child has a particular toy they like, place it higher up on a shelf, so they can see it but not reach it themselves. Wait to see if the child will indicate they would like the toy and support them to request it. Initially, the child may point or try and reach it, model asking for the toy as you give it to them.
- If the child has poor joint attention skills, it is important to work on this in order to develop speech, language and communication. Activities such as bucket games ([Building attention skills in children: THE BUCKET! - YouTube](#)) and intensive interactions ([What is Intensive Interaction? - YouTube](#)) may help to support the development of joint attention.
- Play games and activities to develop listening and attention skills. E.g.: a sound walk, repeating/identifying games with musical instruments, stop/go games, etc.
- Consider using talking boxes, particularly when introducing new topics:

Who are Talking Boxes for?

All children from age 2 years until the end of the pre-school year. Including:

- Children who have attention and listening difficulties
- Children with communication difficulties
- Children with EAL (English as an additional language)
- Children who already have age-appropriate communication skills.

How do Talking Boxes work?

- The activities can be used as single activities or one after the other.
- They can be used in a small group or with individual children.
- Each session should be between 5-10 minutes dependent on the age and interest of the children.
- If you use the activities in a group then it is best to have 2 adults: one to lead the activities and one to support the children.

Sabotage can be included into daily activities with children.

Examples:

- Give them an empty cup at snack time
- Pass them paper but no pens
- Help them put their coat on and put it on the wrong way
- Sing/say the wrong words in familiar rhymes/stories
- Put things away in the wrong place when supporting tidy up time
- Give them paint pot with no paint in
- Open the water tray but do not fill with water

Observations:

- How do children communicate something is wrong? Do they pass you items back, do they laugh, do they walk away, can they say a word? Make a note of the methods they use be mindful of non-verbal communication methods such as stilling, smiling, eye-contact etc.
- **Gather detailed observations of preferred methods of communication for possible referral to specialist services.**

Stop and Go Games – encourage children to listen and follow an instruction

Outside play running game using red and green cards.

Children can run when you say "Go" hold the green card. Children must stay still when you say "stop" and hold the red card. (The cards will support children to understand the words 'go' and 'stop').

As children become familiar with the game you could change the action – stomp, jump, walk, crawl etc.

Observations

Who follows the cue from the cards? These children will stay close so they can see the cards, observe do they not understand the word or do they not hear what you are saying?

Which children continue to run? Are they struggling to pay attention to what they should be doing?

Make a note of any children that follow their peers – do they not understand so they copy others?

Gather detailed observations of children's understanding and listening skills for possible referral to specialist services

Listening walks – support children to listen to sounds in the environment and to distinguish between sounds

Take a small group of children on a walk each time you hear a sound say 'stop' and 'listen' encourage the children to identify the sound you can hear. You can walk around the grounds of your setting, you could walk around just the outdoor area. You could even walk around inside nursery.

Observations

Can the children identify a range of sounds?

Are children able to name the sounds they hear?

If there is time you could prepare pictures of the different sounds you might hear on the walk and the children could use these to support them to identify the sounds they may point to them instead of naming them.

Gather detailed observations of children's understanding and listening skills for possible referral to specialist services

Ready, Steady Go games – support children to develop their listening and attention skills, they have to be able to wait for 'go' to carry out an action, can also be used to support speaking and turn taking.

Activities:

Cars and ramps – hold a car at the top of the ramp children cannot release until you say ready, steady...go, can include 2 children to encourage turn-taking.

Balloon – blow up a balloon say ready, steady...go and release the balloon children must track the balloon retrieve the balloon bring it back and request more/again.

You can increase the pause between steady and go to increase the waiting time for the child/children

Observations

Can the child/children wait for the word 'go'?

Can the child/children retrieve the item and request the game again?

Can the child/children take a turn with another child?

Does the child say the phrase themselves?

Gather detailed observations of children's understanding and listening skills for possible referral to specialist services

Targeted Support

Not all children will need targeted support, but some children will require some additional targeted support with their Communication and Language development for a period of time.

The Communication and Language Road Map for Early Years Settings details and sets out the route for each unique child. www.lancashire.gov.uk/early-years-support-and-training

A child may experience difficulties with any or all of the following areas of development:

- Receptive language – our ability to understand spoken language. Our understanding of the language used around us depends on our receptive skills
- Expressive Language – spoken language that we use (verbal)
- Social communication – the way in which we use language to interact within social situations.
- Pronunciation - the individual sounds that are used in words as we talk.

Concerns should be shared with parents if they have not raised concern themselves.

Information around assessment and intervention can be found at the following:

- I can factsheets [ICAN CHARITY](#)
- Your WellComm screening assessment information [WellComm - GL Assessment \(gl-assessment.co.uk\)](http://WellComm - GL Assessment (gl-assessment.co.uk))
- Your Talk Boost and Early Talk Boost information [Talk Boost - Integrated Treatment Services](#)
- Advice and guidance from Hanen [The Hanen Centre | Speech and Language Development for Children](#)
- Advice and guidance from ELKLAN [Elklan Training Ltd](#)
(There are other organisations available).
- A Targeted learning plan should be developed with parents, the focus being on speech and language, including any other developmental concern as appropriate. This is part of the Graduated Approach involving Assess, Plan, Do, Review cycle (ADPR) recommended every 6-8 weeks.
- Refer to the ATTS document to help to plan small steps progression. [Early years SEND toolkit - Lancashire County Council](#)
- Children are best supported by small group work and some 1:1 support. This should be delivered daily and consistently.
- Children should also be included within the whole class activities as much as practically possible.
- Advice to parents on activities at home to support speech and language development.
- Where concern is persistent over time and the child has a 9 month or more delay, advice from the specialist teacher should be sought and referral to SEND as part of graduated approach should be sought: [Early years Request for Involvement - Lancashire County Council](#) Parental/carer consent is required.
- Consider referral to Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) if not done already.
- Children learning English as an Additional Language (EAL) require support from adults who understand and are knowledgeable in language development and acquisition. It is important to ascertain from parents/carers if their child is experiencing difficulties in their home language.

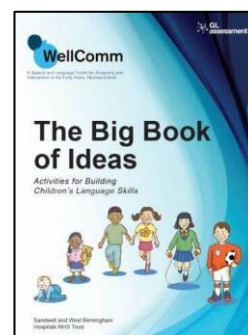


Many providers now have access to the WellComm resources. In this article we discuss how the resources can be used for universal and targeted support. WellComm is a screening tool that can be used with **all** children. Screening can take place whenever you want and as frequently as you like. We suggest screening children on entry to your setting, at the two-year-old check and before any transitions to other rooms, or as they prepare for school. This would be a universal approach for all children. WellComm can also be used as a targeted approach when you are concerned that a child may have underlying speech and/or language problems.

For further information regarding the assessment process, you can watch this training video:

- Part 1 - Pre-Testing Essentials: This will look at the administration process and top tips for successful screening.
- Part 2 - Post-Testing Essentials: This will guide you through your reports, helping you to identify children's next steps. It will also show you how to deliver effective support both within your setting and where applicable, in children's homes. Clear guidance on how to measure children's progress is also included within this section.
- Part 3 - Further Support: This will provide you with information on how and where to seek further guidance and support if needed.

[WellComm Early Years - GL Assessment \(gl-assessment.co.uk\)](http://gl-assessment.co.uk)



The Big Book of Ideas can be used with all children, no matter what they score, but it is useful to follow and personalise strategies for a child who may have been identified as needing extra support.

If you are in Preston, Chorley or South Ribble district there will be an information and training session on **Wednesday 7th February, 10am – 12.30, 13.00-15.30 and 16.00-18.30 at Cotton Court, Church Street, Preston, PR1 3BY** For further information, please e-mail: healthimprovement@lancashire.gov.uk

Little Steps is the offer for 2- to 5-year-olds that launched in libraries in 2023, having been developed in consultation with speech and language specialists.

The scheme involves a series of flashcards featuring bright animal characters. Each of these focusses on a different developmental theme, including emotions, making friends, finding your voice, family, self-esteem and growing up, through use of a recommended book list and suggested activities for you and your child to enjoy together, giving them confidence, learning and practise.

Over 2,500 children have registered so far with the jungle character cards. This year a new set of cards featuring lovely ocean characters is being released, allowing you and your child to continue using the scheme throughout the year.

Little Steps is completely **free** to participate in at any Lancashire library. Also look out for the free regular activity sessions taking place at your library too.



Visiting The Bay Cottage Play Area in Heysham and Walk along Heysham Coast to St Patrick's Chapel and the Rock Cut Graves



What better way to spend a cold winter day than a FREE day



out to a lovely refurbished play area with beautiful views across Morecambe Bay. Eden bear enjoys playing on the new play equipment and a play in the sand. You could even take a picnic!

Eden Bear is keen to say hello to the horses and Eden Bear agreed with us that it is fab to look over to the mountains and you may be lucky enough to see a rainbow over the Bay.

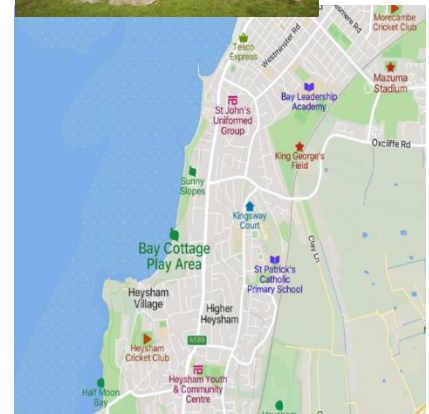
After a play on the park, all wrapped up in your hat, scarf and gloves, you could take a short walk along the Heysham Coast to visit St Patrick's chapel and the Rock-cut graves.

According to local legend, St Patrick came ashore here in the 5th century after being shipwrecked, and subsequently established a small chapel on the headland.



Located just south of the chapel, the rock cut graves were cut from the sandstone headland. Look out for several that are body-shaped and have rock-cut sockets; these were possibly designed to hold wooden crosses. It's thought that

the graves were created around the 11th century and were used for burying very high-status people. Take a moment to absorb the atmosphere of the area around you – it's easy to feel transported back in time.



Toilets/ changing facilities could be used in nearby Royal Hotel in Heysham, if desperate!



How are you finding your role as a Language Lead?

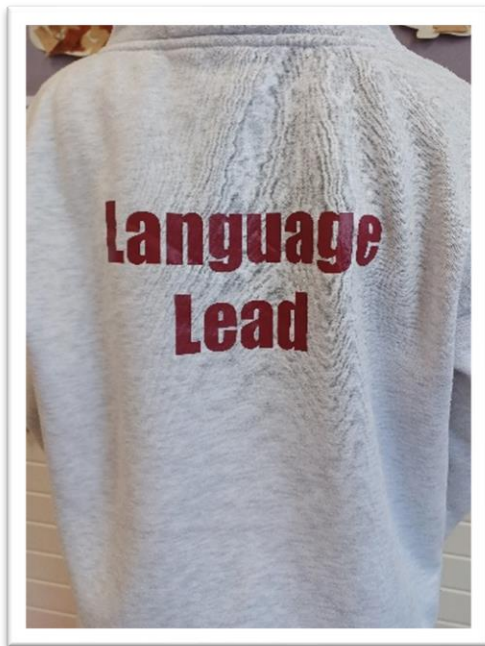
Do you feel confident supporting colleagues and families to promote children's speech and language?

Is there anything that you are missing and would like to know more about?

We would love to hear how you are getting on. Any feedback would be greatly appreciated. Thank you!

Here are some examples of how practitioners are developing the Language Lead role.

At Cathedral Pre-School, Lancaster, the Language Lead has her very own hoodie! This has encouraged parents to speak to the Language Lead regarding any speech, language or communication concerns.



As our language lead and also as the manager I am able to track progression from our babies through to our Pre-School age children.

I have recently been teaching the Early Talk Boost and working with small groups of children in our Pre-School which is working well but I have to juggle my time round a bit and also a bit of a challenge as they attend on different days.

We are also using the Universally speaking document as an 'expectation' guide so that we keep our language teaching as a focus in everything we do with children.

Debbie, First Footsteps, Leyland

I am doing well with the Language lead. We have recently started the Wellcomm pack, which is helping.

Noreen, Edenfield Nursery

I am enjoying the role for our setting. We are a setting broken down into 4 rooms. Each room has a language professional and after every Language cluster meeting we meet so I can feed back. The information is then fed back via the language professional to all staff in each room.

I feel confident supporting colleagues and families with all the information provided. Plenty of links for further information and resources if needed provided.

At this time all areas required are covered by yourselves.

Sarah, SENCo, Bank Hall Kindergarten

I have enjoyed being part of this group and also my local Language Lead group. They support you to keep focussed and refresh ideas of how to keep supporting our families. I also like to listen to what other settings are doing and share ideas.

We have just completed the LQA in Communication and Language which was a great way of getting the whole team together and really focussing on the environment with speech and language and vocabulary at the heart of it.

Julie, Heyhouses Nursery

I feel I would like more confidence on knowing how to approach parents, and what to do if we think there may be a potential speech issue....

Sometimes it's easy to think oh they are only 2 (or whatever age) and think let's give them longer.

Also, how to engage parents in the first initial conversations without upsetting them.

Sometimes I feel a referral may be too much but feel that something is needed.

Natalie, childminder, Wyre district

Useful video here: [Talking to parents about their child's speech, language and communication](#)

I feel the role of Language Lead and the cluster meetings has benefitted our setting as I am able to support colleagues with my up to date knowledge and signpost them in the right direction of support.

I have been able to assist supporting families with strategies and various resources, such as using the big book of ideas to follow through Wellcomm targets.

As a setting we would like some support or resources with Makaton training, if they are available.

Jess, The Ducklings Day Nursery, Skelmersdale

Makaton taster sessions:

[How can I Develop my Knowledge and Skills? | Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust](#)

Useful Resources

Education Endowment Early Years Evidence Store

[EEF | Communication and Language \(educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk\)](https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk)



There are some useful videos to watch on here.



The Early Years curriculum- A focus on communication and language

[\(3\) Part 1 - Early years curriculum: The importance of communication and language - YouTube](#)

This is a series of four webinars.



Next Cluster Meeting

Wednesday 28th February at 13.30-15.00

[Click here to join the meeting](#)