

## Newsletter

Summer 2024

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Next Cluster Meeting

Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> June at 13.30-15.00

LINK at the end of the newsletter



Welcome everyone to this Summer edition of the Language Lead newsletter.

We do hope you are having an enjoyable Summer term so far – this academic year is certainly flying by!

Early years and childcare are a fundamental part of a child's development. As we are all aware, high quality early years provision can generate sustained and significant improvements on children's outcomes reducing disparities in later life. Not only does good quality provision have a positive impact on children's development, it also ensures that parents and carers can feel confident to access childcare.

A child's earliest years are their foundation - if we give them a great start, they have a much better chance of fulfilling their potential as they grow up. By the time disadvantaged young people sit their GCSEs at age 16 they are, on average, 18.4 months behind their peers and around 40 per cent of that gap has already emerged by age five. Pre-school has almost as much impact on a child's educational achievement at age 11 as primary school - and the impact is even greater for those who may develop learning difficulties.

The government published its Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and Alternative Provision (SEND AP) Improvement Plan in March 2023.

"Our ambition is to create a society that celebrates, encourages, and enables the success of all children and young people, including those with SEND and in alternative provision. A society where we hold high aspirations for all children and young people, recognising that although success looks different for everyone, it is no less worthy of celebration." SEND and AP Improvement Plan, 2023, p.22

[SEND and alternative provision improvement plan - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/111422/send-and-ap-improvement-plan-2023.pdf)

The Improvement Plan has the ambition to improve the whole SEND system from the early years through to further education and beyond. As part of this, the intention is that each child will be able to attend the most appropriate early years setting.

Furthermore, the SEND AP Improvement Plan, acknowledges the importance of the EYs sector in particular with regard to early identification and beginning those sensitive conversations with parents/carers about their child's needs.

Following on from this, the government will be publishing several 'practice standards' for frontline professionals, one of which will be about speech and language. The government are currently trialling the Early Language and Support For Every Child (ELSEC) to find new ways of working to better identify and support children with speech and language challenges in early years and primary schools.

ELSEC is a two-year pathfinder programme to fund innovative workforce models to improve early identification and support for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs within early years and primary school settings.

An Early Years Professional Development Programme has been introduced by the government which aims to develop early years staff skills in speech, language and communication, maths skills and emotional development.

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

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

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

Best wishes from the EYs SLCN Team.



# Spotlight on Signing

## Using Makaton signing with Early Years

### Makaton Facts

- ★ Makaton is a signing system based on British Sign Language.
- ★ Makaton is used alongside spoken words to support communication
- ★ Makaton is the signing system used by Mr Tumble on Something Special
- ★ Makaton does not replace spoken language, it is used alongside spoken words to support and develop children's communication skills



### Why Use Makaton?

Makaton is a great way to support both children's understanding and use of language. Adding in a sign when you talk adds on a visual clue, to help children tune into the words you are saying and helping to draw children's attention to you. Children may be able to use a sign instead of a spoken word in order to communicate their ideas to other people. Using Makaton signs also supports children's understanding of language. As well as all these benefits, Makaton is really fun!

### Where to start with Makaton

The best way to start using Makaton is to start with a few key signs. Choose ones which your children will find interesting and motivating. There are loads of resources online to help you get started, e.g. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/joinin/something-special-getting-started-with-makaton>. Pick one or two signs to start with.

Remember, when you use Makaton signs:

- Always speak at the same time you are signing
- Use short, simple sentences
- Just use one Makaton sign at a time to start with
- Be face to face, so your child can see your face and hands clearly when you sign
- Try and use the signs often during the day so your child gets lots of practise.
- Find times to use the signs during everyday routines and play activities so children see them being used in context.
- Remember children will need to see you use the signs lots of times throughout the day to get used to the idea of using signs.

Local libraries also have lots of Makaton resources (you may need to specifically request these), which are available to borrow.

## Useful Early Years Makaton Signs



More



Help



Biscuit



Car



Blocks/Lego



Drink

If you are interested in learning more Makaton signs, you can access training courses to help you learn more Makaton signs, and to start using them in your setting. For more information, speak to your local speech and language therapist, or go to [www.makaton.org](http://www.makaton.org).

### Upcoming courses:

**Makaton Taster:** 8/7/24 10am – 11:30am via Microsoft Teams. To apply for a place, contact [SLT.Training@lscft.nhs.uk](mailto:SLT.Training@lscft.nhs.uk).

(For settings supporting a child on the SLT caseload in the Burnley/Pendle, Hyndburn/Ribble Valley/Rossendale, Blackburn with Darwen, Chorley/South Ribble, Greater Preston and West Lancs areas).



**Makaton level 1, 2 and 3** available courses throughout May and June in Fylde and Wyre

[Book a course with us :: Blackpool Teaching Hospitals](#)

### Other useful websites:

[www.singinghands.co.uk](http://www.singinghands.co.uk)

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/grownups/makaton>

By Jodi Roberts, Speech and Language Therapist

# Top tips for developing understanding with non-verbal children

## Understanding

As you read with your children, give them opportunities to interact nonverbally.

### Here are some activities you can share as you read:

- Run your finger just under the text as you read. Then ask the child to do the pointing.
- Ask the child to turn the pages at the right time.
- Give children some story props so they can act out the story as it unfolds.
- Take turns imitating what the characters are doing.

Also encourage children to read signs – especially safety-related signage. This can be when you walk through your setting. Reading a stop sign is an important example. The same goes for the street signs, exit and entrance signs. Your setting may use pictures to represent your routines, share this with the children throughout their time in the setting. Snack, washing hands, toileting can be demonstrated using photo stories that can be shared with children as they participate in each step of the routine.

### Reading can support children to develop an understanding of new words such as objects, toys and/or animals.

#### Ideas:

- Create a 'photo' book of things children have a connection to and are motivated by, e.g. 3-4 family members, favourite car, train, ball, book, shoes, coat, snack, building bricks, farm animals etc.
- Exploring animal names and sounds is a fun way to develop listening skills and extend understanding– Look at a simple farm animal book together, preferably 1-2 animals per page. Point to the animal picture, name, and make the sound. Have a tube to make the sound down. Can the child make a sound down the tube too?
- Use animal figures when you are looking at the book. Point and name at an animal in the book and match it with your animal figure. Once you have done this a few times, see if the child will show you the animal in the book, when you show them the animal figure. Ask the child to give you the named animal.

This can be done with transport books, simple first word books, simple food books etc.

#### Observations:

- How do children demonstrate their understanding? Do they pass you items back, do they laugh, do they walk away, do they match object to pictures? Do they touch named object/picture? 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 the child's understanding of words for possible referral to specialist services.**



**Routines made into photo stories – support children to learn each step of a routine whilst also developing skills such as reading from left to right and that pictures can represent words.**

**Develop a series of pictures that represent your routines and display them in the relevant areas:**

Hand Washing: Displayed above sink: tap on, water, soap, wash hands, water, tap off, paper towel.

Toileting: Displayed on toilet door: pants down, sit on toilet, toilet paper, pants up, flush, wash hands

Snack: - Displayed in snack area: cup, plate, sit down,

**Observations:**

Can children follow the photo story to participate in a routine?

Can children start from the left and point to the pictures in order?

**Repetition and Props – support children to learn a story and be able to mimic actions as well as maintain attention.**

Plan time to share the same story every day for a week with children in small groups.

At the start of the week, you may just look at pictures and label (have props to match as you label)

You may progress by supporting children to match props to pictures.

You may use props to role play parts of the story.

You may encourage children to use props to act out the story.

**Observations**

Can the children identify pictures/props?

Are children able to match props to pictures?

Are children able to act out parts of the story?

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

**Thank you to Abigail Hyatt (Senior Specialist HLTA), Louise Heffernan and Helena Davidson (Specialist HLTAs) for this article.**

## Top tips for developing expression with non-verbal children

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.

### 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

**-Encourage and respond to all attempts at communication.**

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

#### **Activity idea:**

**Snack time:** Make snack a learning opportunity, begin by using a plate as an object of reference, each time snack is taking place hold the plate as you say the word "snack" offer the children choices – milk or water, cracker or breadstick, apple or banana etc. Encourage the use of Makaton signs – more, please, thank you, milk, water. Hold up each object as you offer the choice.

#### **Observations:**

To note responses, how do they communicate their choice? Look, point, grab, sign, sound.

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

Do the children recognise the plate and manoeuvre themselves to the snack area?

Can any of the children use Makaton signs?

#### **Next Steps:**

Sabotage snack to create more opportunities for the children to communicate.

Give them an empty cup – how do they tell you they need a drink?

Give them a small amount of snack – how do they request more?





**Observe, Wait and Listen**

- Support children to recognise and/or label items
- Encourage and support all attempts at communication.
- Continue to support spoken language with objects, gestures, signs.

**Activity:**

**What's in the box/bag?**

Set time aside to explore items in the box/bag. Ideas for your box- farm animals, zoo animals, household items – spoon, plate, cup, fork, chair, bed (from dolls house), clothing – hat, gloves, shoe, sock. The box/bag could relate to themes, and you could also share books relating to the same theme.

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 for each child to choose an item, label the item and model the Makaton sign.

**Observations:**

Noting responses to different stimuli.

Note attempts to copy or imitate.

Record any communicative attempts, including non-verbal- looking towards, reaching towards, vocalisations? Do they make the animal sounds?

Interpret what you think the child is communicating.

**Next steps:**

Can children point/sign/grab an item on request?

## The role of the keyworker

Observe, Wait and Listen:

1. Find out what motivates me.
2. Make a list of what motivates me.
3. Observe how I communicate over a period of time.
4. Record what I communicate for.
5. Monitor progress.

What motivates me to communicate?	How am I communicating?	Why am I communicating	Am I emerging, developing or consistent?
Favourite toy	Pointing	To choose/ indicate wanting something	Emerging – point 1:3 (Jan 24) Developing - 3:5 (Mar 24)
Bubbles	Looking (eye-glance)	To notice a stimulus / I like that.	Consistent - I look every time (May 24)
Spinning toy	Touch	More/again	Developing – touch 2:5 (Feb 24)
Lights	Stilling (stop still)	To show interest/aware	Emerging – 1:3 (Mar 24)
Feather on arm	Pull away/turn away	I don't like it	Consistent – every time (May24)

**The above table is an example of how you can record children's reasons for communication and the methods they are using to communicate. The numbers show how many times a child has used the method of communication out of how many times they had the opportunity e.g 1:3 = once out of 3 opportunities.**

Reference to supporting materials.

- More than words Hanen programme [The Hanen Centre | Speech and Language Development for Children](#)
- Wellcomm [WellComm - GL Assessment \(gl-assessment.co.uk\)](#)

**Thank you to Louise Heffernan (Specialist HLTA) for this article.**

# Specialist Support for developing Speech, Language and Communication skills with 3–4-year-olds.

## Specialist Support for the Non-Verbal Child

Children who have been identified as requiring targeted support to develop their Communication and Language development may continue to experience delay and therefore more specialist support may be considered.

Information should be shared with parents/carers and their consent should be given to refer to speech and language therapy services, if not already considered or actioned.

A referral to the Specialist Teaching Service should also be considered if a Request for Involvement (RFI) has not been submitted or the child is not yet known to our service at this time.

Consider, if not already, if an Early Help Assessment (EHA) needs to be in place, to ensure that the Child's needs are being met. This may include referral to a Paediatrician.

If EHA in place, Team Around the Family (TAF) meetings should take place on a regular basis.

- It is common for children with additional needs to have communication difficulties. These difficulties may include children whose communication is described as non-verbal. Non-verbal does not mean that a child can't vocalise. These children struggle to communicate their wants/needs and unwanted behaviour may be seen as they struggle to express themselves. Equally there are non-verbal children who appear content in their own company and avoid social interaction.
- For these children, the role of the Key Person, SENCo, and Communication Champion is vital in giving the child a voice. All staff in the nursery setting are responsible for all children with special needs and should be aware of strategies, targeted learning plans and care plans (for some children)
- Staff working with the child need to know them well; aware of their actions, body language and facial expressions as a way of communicating. For example, a child pushing others may want to interact with them and cannot communicate this. Likewise the push may be a sign of dysregulation and the child is seeking some form of sensory input, or the other child is in their space, and they want them out of the way.
- Noticing if they are unwell, what makes them happy, what makes them sad, establishing the relationship with parents so that you work together in partnership to support their child.

It would be assumed that by the pre-school year, concerns will have been raised and the graduated approach will be underway, although there are exceptions.

- A Targeted learning plan should be developed with parents, the focus being on speech and language, including any other developmental concern as appropriate. Information and advice from the Speech and Language Therapist's plan will inform objectives and strategies.
- Ensure that the targets are SMART.
- This forms part of the Graduated Approach; the Assess, Plan, Do, Review cycle (ADPR) recommended every 6-8 weeks.
- Refer to ATTS document to help to plan small steps progression.

- [Early years SEND toolkit - Lancashire County Council](#)

Suggested strategies may include the following:

- Developing attention
- Intensive interaction
- Sabotage
- Introduction of visuals
- Introduction of sign language/Makaton
- PECs
- Playful partner



It is important that time is set aside to conduct interventions and that it is consistent, persistent, and delivered daily.

The activities may be conducted on a 1:1 basis or in small groups in a distraction free area.

Children should also be supported in the continuous provision to practise their communication skills.

It would be beneficial to develop an individual provision map alongside a TLP to identify when intervention is to take place, who is going to deliver it, what staff training may be needed and what the cost implications are.

With the involvement of the Specialist Teacher, settings are able to apply for additional Inclusion Funding to support intervention and to purchase additional resources identified for the needs of the child. Please see the following link for further information.

[Inclusion fund - Lancashire County Council](#)

Where a child is considered to be developing at 15 months or below in two or more areas, at the start of their pre-school year: Education Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA) should be submitted.

[EHC needs assessment request forms - Lancashire County Council](#)

**The Communication and Language Road Map for Early Years Settings** details and sets out the route for each unique child.

[Early years support and training - Lancashire County Council](#)

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**Thank you to Lydia Benson (Specialist Teacher) for this article.**

## Communication and Language Outdoors

We are in the midst of the Summer term and hopefully the sun is shining on us, so there is no excuse not to be outside! Some of children's most developed language emerges naturally when they are playing outdoors, and for many children the opportunity to run around being noisy is denied them in all other contexts. Don't ignore the enhanced opportunities for developing oracy and communication skills when children are playing outdoors. Encourage children to find their voice in a big way!

### Learning opportunities

A properly resourced outdoor area can deliver the same rich learning experiences as the indoors:

- Developing imaginative role play and acting out stories in large open spaces
- Linking language with physical movement in action games and songs and exploring forces and movement
- Using voice in a variety of ways, from quiet conversation to loud shouting, and all variations in between
- Negotiating plans, activities and use of equipment and space
- Developing social and communication skills when playing with others
- Using language to recreate roles and experiences, such as driving a car or climbing a mountain
- Learning scientific and descriptive vocabulary relating to outdoors, such as weather, plants, minibeasts, traffic
- Acting as spectators, narrators or commentators on each other's play and actions

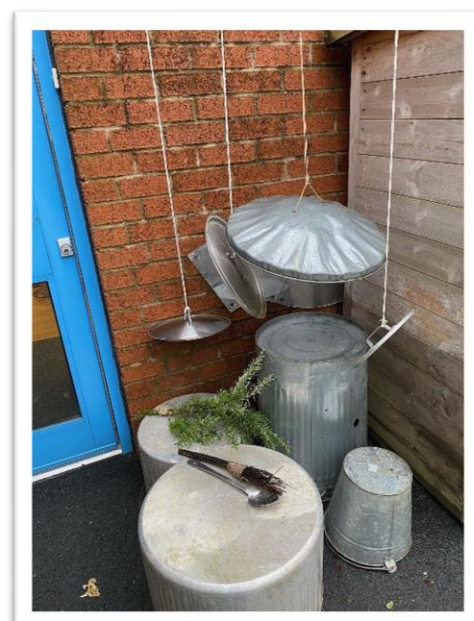
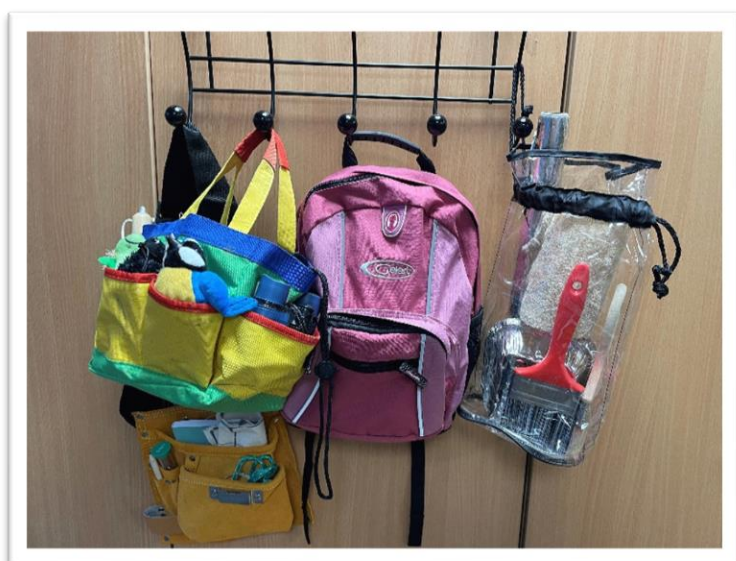




## Resources and activities

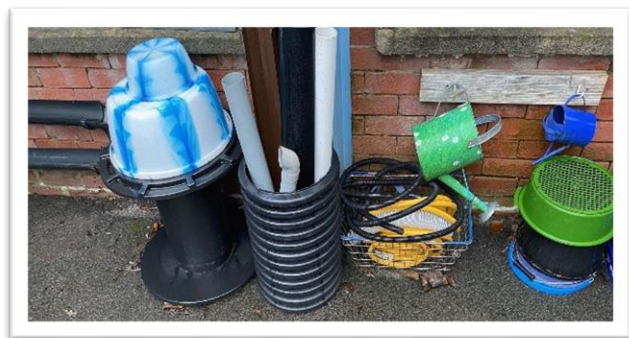
When resourcing the outdoors, practitioners should seek to capitalise on the fact that movement and sound can be on a much larger scale and so bring fresh opportunities to develop communication and language skills:

- Act out stories and games that encourage a range of imaginative movement, such as slithering, galloping, pouncing and wriggling, and introduce the words alongside the actions.
- Play 'lead and follow' games such as 'Simon Says' using oral as well as visual signals.
- Experiment with microphones, megaphones and loudspeakers. Provide materials such as cones and cylinders of card and large plastic bottles with the bottoms cut off.
- Play games such as 'What's the time Mr Wolf?' or 'May I?'. Encourage practitioners and parents to share memories of similar games and explain the rules. Display a list of the games outside as a reminder to practitioners.
- Encourage children to experiment with voice pitch and volume, for example, going from high to low as they come down the slide or shouting from the top of the climbing frame.
- Provide baskets, suitcases, holdalls or wheeled shoppers for carrying role-play or small-world toys outdoors.





- Imaginative activities enable the children to extend their vocabulary, creating a range of scenarios in the outside environment. Mud kitchens encourage and enhance children’s role play experiences, offering them to use a variety of nouns and verbs to describe what they are doing.
- Building dens is a great way to support children with language and communication skills. This encourages children to work as a team to create a den for them to use.
- Bug hotels offer the opportunity for children to use their investigation skills. Providing tools such as magnifying glasses and clear plastic pots, allows children to explore the environment and the creatures that may live inside.
- Mark making activities in the outdoor environment can offer children a large scale to work on. Paintbrushes in water or chunky chinks can be used on surfaces such as walls or concrete floors to create art work and make marks.
- Create a treasure hunt in the outdoor environment where children find objects and talk about what they have found and where it was.
- Allowing children to take part in races by either running or using bikes, can support their understanding and language skills. Children will learn vocabulary such as slow, fast, stop and go. Using traffic signs and symbols can extend children’s knowledge of their environment, whilst supporting them to use words learnt in context.



**Article by Julie Ebden (Early Years Consultant)**

## Are you still walking and talking?

The Walk and Talk resources are available for you to share with families on our website. We have a dedicated parent site [Walk and Talk - Lancashire County Council](#) where parents can download the talking tips and walk and talk cards ready for their adventures.

At the University of Central Lancashire Pre-School Centre the walk and talk campaign is still going strong. The entrance to nursery contains walk and talk cards for the local area that families can use.



Have a look on the website under 'Local places to visit' to see if there are any walk and talk cards for your local area. If there aren't, we would be delighted if you wanted to make a card that we can add to the website.

**Thank you to UCLAN Pre-school for sharing their display.**

## Case Study: Heyhouses Nursery

Heyhouses Nursery School is situated in Lytham St Annes. Their Language Lead, Julie Ward shares with us the wide variety of strategies and activities they implement to support speech and language at the setting.



In Nursery we have completed the Lancashire Quality Award in Communication and Language. We are very proud of this, it gave our team the opportunity to review and look at our environment regarding vocabulary, linking with parents, speech and language ages and stages and many other considerations.

We implemented “Book of the Week”, we choose a book and we extend it over the week in different ways. We retell in our own words, make up new stories, learn new vocabulary, discuss in groups and use to create related activities. We also then share with parents, through Evidence Me, which reinforces what they have learnt, and parents can model at home.

We have a Library hut for the children to borrow or swop books and have now resourced one for our parents/carers. This is working well. Our new starters love taking a book when they come for a play visit. It helps support the transition.





We have created an intervention team, we have an EAL champion, Talk Boost Team and Wellcomm support. This has enabled all the programmes and communication about the children to be consistent.

We have opened our side garden to the children to learn about gardening, and transfer what they learn on our walks, they have a communication friendly den where they can sit and talk or read a book if they don't want to dig and plant. This is in small groups and enables new vocabulary, understanding of instructions as well as talking to our friends.



We have daily walk and talk sessions. The children go every day for a walk around the school grounds, we talk about what we see, hear, and smell as well as exploring seasonal changes. This supports new vocabulary, conversation, and social cues, and interactions. There is something new to talk about every day.

We have in our setting "Talk Boost groups" and we also use the "Wellcomm screening" this has been very beneficial to our children. It enables the team to use the big book of ideas to support children who we would have otherwise referred to Speech and Language. We can now be proactive in the setting and in some cases the children will develop and move on in their language.



Although I can't always make the Language Lead Cluster meetings, I know that Louise and Francis (Speech and Language Therapists in Fylde and Wyre) are there for any support or help. This has encouraged me to feel confident to support our children and understand the challenges they may have with speech and language delay. And to know that we have the best available resources to be able to deliver and support this before the need to refer to speech and language therapy.

**Thank you to Julie and the team at Heyhouses Nursery for sharing their work.**

## Happy Mount Park

Marine Road East, Morecambe LA4 5AQ

The park is open daily from 8.30am to dusk.

Activities and attractions include: Unique outdoor natural adventure play area, Ornamental gardens, woodland walk and habitat trail and smaller play area.

There are also paid activities: adventure golf, trampolines, swing boats and a train ride.



There is a café and ice cream van, but also picnic tables and grass areas to enjoy a picnic. There are toilets and disabled toilets on site too.

**Splash Park Opening times are weekends-only in term time and then fully during school holidays. The Splash Park will be open daily from May to September, weather dependent.**

Entry to the Splash Park costs £4 per person (including adults) and £1 for spectators for one of the six daily sessions.



Thank you to Jenny Knowles from Ryelands Nursery and Primary School for the recommendation.

## Useful Resources



The NHS Start for Life has advice for parents and carers to support speech and language development from [1 to 2 years](#), [2 to 3 years](#), and [3 to 5 years](#). Of course, these activity ideas to support early communication can be used in your setting too.



[Help build our amazing brains together | Start for Life | NHS \(youtube.com\)](#)

The Start for Life 'Little Moments Together' campaign is an initiative by the Department for Education and Department for Health and Social Care that aims to educate parents and carers about the importance of brain development in the first five years of a child's life, and the crucial role they play. The campaign focuses on behaviours that can easily be integrated into busy daily routines, showing parents and carers that sharing simple, child-led 'serve and return' moments together throughout the day has a big impact.

Next Cluster Meeting

Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> June at 13.30-15.00

[Click here to join the meeting](#)