



Speech and Language Unit

Date ratified: June 2023

Date for review: June 2025

Language is viewed as the most important means of thinking about and responding to the world. Children will be encouraged to become aware of the need to communicate and to listen actively with understanding. They will be supported in their ability to communicate so that the message and meaning are clear, and they are able to converse and discuss in a manner appropriate to their level of development.

Whilst our speech and language unit does not and never has had an admission criterion, given by the Education Authority (EA) Belfast Region, our current profile of pupil consists of the following: -

Development Language Disorder

Language Disorder associated with Biomedical Condition, mainly Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). This term refers to a pupil with severe persistent language difficulties over and above a known biomedical condition such as autism.

Speech Sound Disorder with Developmental Language Disorder (DLD)

What was previously referred to as Specific Language Impairment is now referred to as DLD which better reflects the types of difficulties children have. A pupil with DLD despite having an IQ above 70 has unexplained and persistent language difficulties which significantly impact on their language.

OBJECTIVES

- To deliver the Northern Ireland curriculum at the level appropriate to each child's age and ability.
- To assist children to become effective communicators and to use their language skills for the range of learning activities offered.
- To create a classroom environment that will support and encourage the development of language.
- To base planning on careful assessment using both formative and summative methods
- To design language activities in response to the individual child's current and emergent skills, often using the SLT's care plans as a reference.
- To use appropriate resources and specific programmes to promote language skills, and to review the relevance of these resources and their effectiveness.
- To work in partnership with parents and to encourage them to support their child's language programme.
- To recognise the importance of play as a vehicle for early years' language learning and to structure play provision to support this learning.
- To collaborate with all those professionals who can contribute to the child's programme of language development.
- To participate in relevant training courses that will ensure continuing professional development.
- To monitor, evaluate and review the teaching strategies implemented throughout the unit.
- To successfully integrate the children into the mainstream classes of the school according to the child's needs development and ability.

- To use the expertise of the staff in the SLU to benefit pupils in the mainstream school.

ROLES OF THERAPISTS AND TEACHERS

- The speech and language therapist (SLT) will be aware of the role of the teacher and of the education authority. The SLT will be concerned with individual communication difficulties.
- The teacher will be aware of the role of the SLT and become familiar with the structure and organisation of the therapy provision. Teachers will be involved with teaching and learning across the curriculum.
- The classroom is the learning environment in which the child functions. Teachers' planning in collaboration with the therapists should take account of this. Within this context, teachers have opportunities to observe pupils in a naturalistic setting and to note difficulties which may not always be apparent in therapy.

ROLES OF CLASSROOM ASSISTANTS

- To assist in creating a physical environment which will stimulate language development.
- To give additional assistance to an individual pupil when deemed necessary.
- To contribute to a good working partnership between teacher and classroom assistant.
- To liaise with the teacher regarding a child's progress, which will inform formative assessment and future planning.
- To use relevant training to support individual children's needs.
- To assist with SLT homework in lieu of parents.
- Classroom assistants have training in:
 - ASD training-accredited
 - Team Teach positive handling-accredited
 - Transition (training provided by ASD advisory service)
 - Basic First Aid -accredited
 - ELKAN – accredited
 - Nurture Groups – in-house
 - Cascade training from the SLT in use of AAC, a symbol-based communication chart
 - Makaton-accredited
 - Better Reading Partnership- accredited
 - Dyslexia Training-accredited
 - Attention Autism, delivered by Middletown Centre for Autism foundation stage)
 - Zones of Regulation, by Middletown Centre for Autism (KS2)
 - Word Aware delivered by the RISE team

Delivery of the Northern Ireland Curriculum

- We aim to combine the curriculum with a whole language approach. The areas of learning, as defined in the NI curriculum, will be offered to each child working towards achieving the level appropriate to their abilities.
- Children will follow a programme of work based on summative and ongoing formative assessment by the teacher, SLT and classroom assistants. This will identify language issues which arise in the classroom, enabling staff to modify their teaching approaches accordingly.
- Children's expressive, receptive language and speech sound disorders will be supported using the following approaches: -
Word Aware
Makaton
Shape Coding
Cued Articulation
- The classroom environment will be modified depending on the additional needs of the current class to ensure access to the curriculum.
- Strategies are implemented which elicit language from some pupils and model and teach correct pragmatic skills to others.

Staff Development

- Teachers and classroom assistants will be given the opportunity to attend appropriate courses to aid in the delivery of the N.I curriculum in the Speech and Language Unit.
- Teachers in the unit have acquired the following training:
 - Primary Movement- accredited
 - Team Teach- accredited
 - TEACCH- accredited
 - ELKAN Comprehension Programme (in-house)
 - ABA- accredited
 - Makaton- accredited
 - Nurture Group-accredited
 - Cascade training on the impact of domestic violence on pupils (in-house)
 - Mindfulness – completion of 8-week course with Mindfulnessni.org
 - Shape Coding – accredited
 - Cued Articulation – in-house from SLT
 - Attention Autism, delivered by Middletown Centre for Autism (foundation stage)
 - Zones of Regulation, delivered by Middletown Centre for Autism (KS2)
 - Cued Articulation – in-house, delivered by the SLT

Where appropriate if a member of staff from the SLU attends training, that expertise will be disseminated to the whole SLU staff.

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Examples of this cascade training are Mindfulness (RTU) The Impact of Physical and Emotional Abuse (Women's Aid), ELKAN comprehension (Henrietta McLachlan and Liz Elks) and Nurture Training (Nurture UK).

The issues arising from training inform the objectives of the SLU's action plan. Inclusion in the action plan ensures that whole staff training days are facilitated by the management of the school.

Due to maternity leave and a change in staff not all the current teachers will have completed all the training previously mentioned.

Collaborative Practice

Taughmonagh Primary School

Pupils in the SLU routinely share the playground, dining hall, play area with pupils from the mainstream school. Throughout the year they join with pupils from the mainstream classes to perform plays, assemblies, and carol services. Additionally, they join with pupils from the mainstream for coaching and for educational visits. The pupils from both the mainstream and the SLU going swimming together, on a weekly basis. As part of the year 7 transition programme pupils from the SLU join the mainstream year 7s.

Pupils from the mainstream school join the unit if something that is being taught would meet their additional needs. For example, mindfulness meditation to reduce anxiety and lessons on Social Use of Language.

Wider Educational Community

Links with speech and language schools have been fostered. For example, teachers are part of the Cluster Group including Castle Garden and Belvoir Speech and Language Units.

Where appropriate, children make their First Communion and Confirmation with the pupils from Harberton Special School.

Pupils from Taughmonagh SLU are involved in joint projects with pupils from the Extended Schools Special Schools Cluster Group. This initiative involves Harberton, Fleming Fulton, Glenveagh and Oakwood. Previously pupils went to New York with pupils from the other schools and pupils from SLU 4 performed an assembly with pupils from Fleming Fulton visiting the schools on this campus. Pupils from SLU 1 attend Jumpjigglejive with pupils from the other schools on the campus.

Currently the SLU is involved in the Shared Education Programme. We are paired with Harberton Special School. As a direct result of this co-operation, we now use the Harberton Reading Scheme with pupils identified as having Specific Literacy Difficulties.

Parental Partnership

All members of the SLU staff prioritise frequent communication with the parents as they are acutely aware that this placement is usually outside the child's own community. Consequently, the following arrangements are in place: -

- Prior to selecting a placement parents can arrange to see the unit and are shown around individually by the SLU coordinator.
- Parents receive a home visit from their child's teacher and classroom assistant before their child attends the unit for the first time.
- During an induction session parents are invited to meet their child's teacher, the speech and language therapists and other parents.
- Parents have an opportunity to discuss their child's progress during consultations with the teacher and on several occasions during the academic year.
- There is regular correspondence between parents and teachers facilitated by the classroom app Seesaw.
- A monthly toy and book library (T&BL) gives parents an opportunity to talk with teachers and have a one-on-one play session with their child. The format of the T&BL follows the Families and Schools Together (F.A.S.T.) programme. This was designed following research carried out by Save the Children. The play session is child-led, and staff members withdraw from the room during this period to encourage quality interactions between the parent and their child. The T&BL is also open to siblings, relatives, and significant adults in the child's life.
- The T&BL is used to facilitate training for parents. This is informal and doesn't encroach on the play session with their child.
- Parents have access to information during the T&BL, for example, literature from autism NI, Women's aid and a Period Poverty Campaign run in school.
- To ensure that no parent is hindered from attending these sessions, due to financial considerations, they can request a Translink Smart card. This will have enough journeys on it for the parent to use public transport to come to school.
- The Translink Smart cards are also provided for parent/teacher consultations and annual reviews.

Teacher and Therapist Partnership

The teachers and speech and language therapists work collaboratively as follows:

- Teachers, consolidate what is taught during SLT led speech groups.
- The therapist and the SLU coordinator discuss educational psychology reports for pupils who apply to the unit.
- The therapist will discuss the concepts being taught in individual therapy to enable the teacher to reinforce them in the classroom.
- Similarly, the therapist will inform the class teacher of ways to enhance the speech and language of individual pupils in the classroom.
- PLPs are written in consultation with the therapist who will advise the class teacher how a target may be broken down incrementally.
- PLPs are written taking individual and group therapy care plans into consideration.

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- Where feasible therapist and teachers jointly conduct parent consultations and annual reviews.
- Therapists and teachers jointly conduct speech groups, planned by the SLT
- Due to a change in current and future provision the SLT will lead a six-week block of speech groups. The SLT led groups may be carried out on alternative weeks with the class teacher, using the SLT targets, leading the remaining 6 weeks.
- The Educational Psychology Service: School Based consultation Record is completed in consultation with the SLT and will include their standardized scores.
- Where necessary as part of the contingency plan it may be necessary for the class teacher to conduct speech group. This will be done using the SLT's care plan and targets.

Personal Learning Plan

At the time of reviewing this policy PLPs have yet to be piloted. The following is based on existing practice prior to Autumn 2023.

As advocated by the N.I. Code of Practice, the class teacher, in consultation with the speech therapist, draws up the PLPs. It is fully implemented in the classroom. Parents are consulted on the action to be taken and advised how best to help their child at home and are given the opportunity to review the previous plan.

Following intervention from Middletown Centre for Autism pupil may have an emotional regulation plan in lieu of a PLP.

ANNUAL REVIEWS

- Annual reviews aim to assess the pupil's progress towards meeting the objectives specified in the statement and to collate information for use in planning future provision for the child. They are an opportunity to consider whether it might be appropriate to review current provision.
- Opportunity will be given for parents and other professionals involved with the pupils to submit a report expressing views prior to the annual review meeting.
- Annual reviews are jointly conducted with the SLT and class teacher when this is feasible.

TRANSITION

Currently, the speech and language unit's intake depend on a pupil receiving a statement where it is stated that their primary difficulty is development language disorder.

Pupils may attend the SLU from a feeder speech and language assessment centre such as Greenwood House Assessment Centre (GHAC), a Key Stage 1 speech and language unit such as St Theresa's SLU or from a mainstream school or nursery. They may start at any time of the academic year and similarly they may leave during it.

At the time of this review the referral pathway is being reviewed to ensure regional equity.

Therefore, transition, both entering the speech and language unit and leaving it, has been made a priority.

As previously mentioned, the following measures are well entrenched to ensure that we have a partnership with the parents and are familiar with the pupils prior to them joining us:

- When a parent expresses an interest in their child attending the SLU they arrange with the speech and language unit coordinator to be shown around the school. This visit enables the SLU coordinator to find out the parent's perceptions of their child's impairment and address any concerns.
- Home visits occur before a pupil attends. These are pre-arranged and both the teacher and the classroom assistant who will be working with the pupil go. This is an invaluable opportunity for parents, in the setting of their homes, to express concerns and share information regarding health and family arrangements.
- All parents are invited to an induction morning. This is an informal gathering where parents will meet the speech and language therapists along all the staff from the unit. Over tea and scones uniforms are purchased, forms completed and returned to the school office. The event is jointly led by the SLU coordinator and head of the therapy department.
- Similarly, if a pupil is moving to a mainstream secondary school, for example St Joseph's, the relevant teacher will take the pupil's documentation and meet with the Special Needs Co-ordinator or a member of the safeguarding team where appropriate.
- If a child is transferring to our mainstream school from the SLU, they will join their new class for golden time or other informal occasions.
- Additionally, a pupil's PLP will include specific targets that will ease their transition to a mainstream setting.

Key Stage two pupils complete two programmes to ease transition into mainstream primary or secondary. They are as follows:

99 1/2 Top Tips is a computer programme designed for pupils who have a diagnosis of autism or Asperger's. Our classroom assistants received training in implementing this series from the ASD outreach service. It is normally started in the spring of year 7. It deals specifically with changes they will encounter such as lockers and timetables. It encourages pupils to expand their emotional vocabulary and voice anxieties regarding leaving primary school.

ADDRESSING PRAGMATIC ISSUES

One of the formative assessments carried out in Taughmonagh speech and language we complete the Wendy Rinaldi assessment on Pragmatic Skills.

For the past decade we have taught metacognitive pragmatic skills. Based on this assessment the teacher will determine what specific communication skills may lead to social isolation for each pupil. This may be too little eye contact, inappropriate proximity, an inability to initiate a conversation or fluctuating volume.

These are often set as targets in education plans and parents are encouraged to model these skills correctly at home. Pupils may be introduced to these lessons as early as the beginning of year five depending on what is developmentally appropriate for them.

We prioritise explicitly teaching these pragmatic skills to enable pupils to rehearse them in the nurturing environment of the unit. We reiterate to parents at every opportunity the importance for their child having pragmatic skills that will sustain conversation with peers.

ADDRESSING SENSORY ISSUES

- Where appropriate the children in the unit are equipped with a multi-sensory kit. These kits are designed to provide the stimulation necessary to enhance alertness and concentration and help social skills.
- Pupils will also have the correct equipment in their classroom to address sensory integration issues e.g., using a tactile cushion to provide sensory feedback or a table wedge to assist in written work.

ADDRESSING EMOTIONAL NEEDS

- The pupils in SLU 4 carry out short daily meditations designed to reduce anxiety, reduce reactionary behaviour, and increase concentration.
- Following the Nurture Training of a teacher from the unit and subsequent cascade training all the classes strive to create an environment to optimise the potential of pupils with attachment issues.
- Mindfulness training and Nurture Group training have informed the SLU's approach to eating breakfast and break in a home-like environment.

FOREST WALKS

- Half termly forest walks take place and involve the children walking to a local woodland area to learn outdoors.
- The walks are planned for and based on themes and topics that the children are learning about in school e.g., seasonal change and minibeasts.
- These walks prove to be language enriching experiences for the children as well as developing their social, emotional, physical, and educational development.
- The SLU has National Trust membership, this enables them to visit Mount Stewart and Rowallane Gardens.

ASSESSMENTS USED

Assessments are conducted throughout the year on the children. These assessments allow teachers to see what level the child is currently working at, and it informs their subsequent planning.

Assessments used are:

- Neale Analysis
- Spar reading & spelling
- Wendy Rinaldi
- Sandwell Early Numeracy Test
- COMET

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- MIST
- PTE&PTM
- NRIT
- PASS

Conclusion

The Staff of the school and the Speech and Language Unit are fully committed to ensuring that each child reaches their potential. Annual action plans are designed and fully implemented to ensure that the child's receptive and expressive language are enhanced to allow them full access to the curriculum.