

A Project to Measure the Needs of Pupils and Staff in 3 Secondary SEBN Schools in Relation to Speech, Language and Communication

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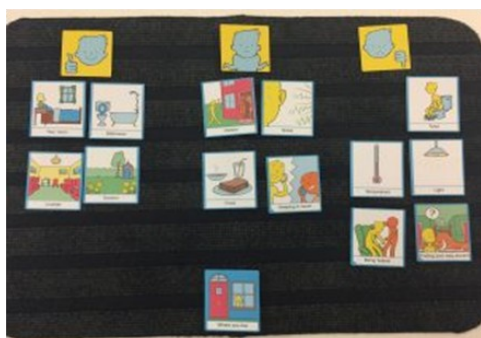
Background to Project

There is a growing body of evidence that suggests a relationship between social, emotional and behavioural needs (SEBN) and speech, language and communication difficulties in children and young people (1). Research indicates children about to be excluded from school showed high levels of speech, language and communication needs (SLCN)(2). It is also known that children with primary language difficulties are more likely to develop social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, which can increase their risk of exclusion and also the risk of entering the criminal justice system (3). This highlights the fact that long-term outcomes can be poor for those with SLCN if the needs of the individuals are not identified and appropriate supports put in place.

The relationship between SEBN and SLCN is further reinforced by the fact they share risk factors such as poverty and exposure to adverse environmental experiences(4). Reducing inequality is key to improving the life chances of children and young people in Scotland and local and national policies are increasingly focusing on contributing to this by improving access to services.

Historically, the speech and language therapy service in NHS Lanarkshire has had education-funded sessions to deliver a service to schools for children and young people with additional support needs (ASN) although to date this has not included the SEBN secondary provisions. Within Lanarkshire, the teachers working within SEBN settings have had more limited contact with speech and language therapy services compared to staff in other specialist provisions for this reason.

In this project, we wanted to identify the needs of staff and pupils in relation to speech, language and communication in the knowledge that both groups had not previously had the same level of access to our service as other ASN provisions *and* that the evidence around behaviour, poverty and adverse childhood experiences suggested the level of need would be high.



The ERRNI assessment (pictured right) gives scores for comprehension, content of narrative, recall of narrative and mean length of utterance



Methodology

Three secondary SEBN schools in North Lanarkshire were involved in the study. The school roll across these provisions totals 110.

Data was gathered from the teaching staff and the young people attending the provisions. It took the form of;

- A staff questionnaire
- Formal and informal assessment of the young people using;
 - * A narrative language assessment called 'The Expressive, Receptive and Recall of Narrative Instrument (ERRNI) (pictured above right)
 - * Talking Mats' (pictured above left) An interactive resource that uses picture communication symbols to express thoughts and feelings
 - * A communication checklist to be completed by a teacher.

Research suggests narrative skills are a particular area of difficulty for young people with SEBN(4).

Narrative skills are essential to tasks such as talking about experiences, contributing to class discussions and restorative justice conversations.

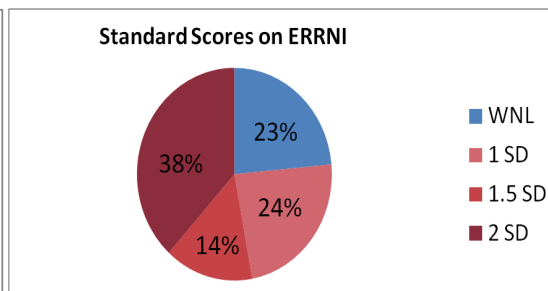
Results

“If I can, I’ll talk to them. It’s really, really hard and it frustrates me”

Pupil

Staff Results 28 staff provided data

- Teacher confidence lowest on gathering the views of pupils with SLCN, identifying young people who have SLCN and understanding the reasons why young people have SLCN
- Of the staff who responded, 96% were either very or quite interested in learning more about ‘SLCN and the relevance to my work’. (see below far left)
- Themes that emerged from qualitative analysis of teacher questionnaires showed staff recognised the breadth of the role of speech and language therapists. For example, teachers spoke of aspects relating to direct and indirect support for pupils, teacher-training and improving access to services.



“It’d be easier to pick out a single pupil who doesn’t find that difficult.”

Teacher talking about social communication

Pupil Results 34 Pupils provided data

- Less than a quarter of the young people assessed were shown to have speech, language and communication skills within normal limits on all subtests of the ERRNI (see blue area on ERRNI diagram below left)
- Over one third of the pupils assessed had at least one standard score which was 2 or more standard deviations below the norm showing severe impairment (see deep red area on the same chart)
- Pupils found it easiest to talk with one friend and people they live with. Auxiliary staff such as dinner ladies, drivers and janitors were easier to talk to than teachers
- Pupil comments about talking were linked to broad themes around relationships with those they are talking with, awareness of their own communication skills and familiarity with the communication task or environment.
- Out of the 10 most commonly teacher-identified areas of communication difficulty, the majority related to the social use of language i.e. Using communication to interact and build relationships.

Recommendations for Practice

This study has found a clear need for support as indicated by the results of the direct assessment of the young people involved. Staff development needs have also been identified and significantly, school staff have indicated motivation to learn more about SLCN. Moreover, there is opportunity to develop a progressive, tiered model of service delivery given the recognition about what a speech and language therapist can offer. Given that priorities in health and education are increasingly focused on reduction of inequalities, particularly for those who have experienced adverse childhood experiences, the authors would propose that there has never been a more appropriate time or opportunity for NHS speech and language therapy to make a difference to young people affected by SEBN.

It is recommended that a service should be jointly planned by partnering with education and other stakeholders. Any interventions should be measured for effectiveness and take into account both education priorities and the recommendations of The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists who suggest the following for service provision to this sector;

“the multidisciplinary health, education and social care teams supporting children and their families have access to speech and language therapy services”

“those with social, emotional or mental health needs should be screened for communication and interaction difficulties.”

“all staff working with children and young people should be trained in recognising and knowing how to respond to communication and interaction needs, including through making classrooms, material and treatment programmes communication and interaction friendly to ensure they are accessible.” (3)

References

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