

SEND Bulletin NO. 16



Specific Language Impairment

Speech and language impairment can vary from mild difficulties to severe problems with the understanding and use of language. A specific language impairment is diagnosed when a child has difficulty with language but is developing normally in all other areas. Many children have speech and language difficulties associated with physical, sensory, neurological and intellectual impairment. Over a million children in the UK have some kind of speech and language impairment. One in 500 of these children has an impairment that is both severe and long term. These learners will have difficulties with understanding and using language in one or more areas.

Key characteristics

Children with a specific language impairment may have difficulties with one or more of these areas:

- **Phonology** - some children have difficulty processing speech sounds and using them correctly, while others confuse or substitute sounds.
- **Grammar** - some children have difficulty organising words into sentences, using the correct grammatical structure (they often muddle verb tenses and have difficulty with conjunctions and prepositions), or they may have difficulty pronouncing -ed, -ing, and -s endings and sound like much younger children in the way they form their sentences.
- **Word-finding** - some learners have difficulty in recalling the right word when they need to use it, having to describe the word rather than naming it (eg 'It's hot. You make tea. You put water in it' for the word 'kettle'), which may be caused by their difficulties.
- **Semantics** (the meanings of words and the way they relate to each other) may be affected by poor auditory memory skills, which can have serious implications for learners in the classroom. If they cannot retain the meaning of new vocabulary, then they will

have difficulty understanding new concepts and ideas, which will in turn affect their ability to express their own thoughts.

- **Attention and listening** - pupils with attention and listening difficulties have one of two problems. Either they cannot screen out what is unimportant from what they hear and so listen to everything, or they lack skill at controlling attention and therefore miss large chunks of information. Oral whole-class teaching can therefore cause great difficulty for these learners.
- **Pragmatics** (the way that language is used to convey thoughts and feelings) - some children have difficulty in understanding how to use language in different social situations and can make very inappropriate remarks.

Support strategies

You may need to:

- use pictures, signs and symbols as teaching aids
- use visual or concrete materials to support the understanding of new conceptual vocabulary across the curriculum
- encourage word association activities to develop word-finding skills
- play games to develop an understanding of categories such as vegetables, fruit or pets
- break instructions into chunks and check for understanding by asking the pupil to repeat each part
- give opportunities for revision of key concepts and vocabulary
- offer a regular therapy programme to address specific speech and language needs
- use alternative methods of recording, such as mind maps, diagrams, charts or writing frames
- use games to develop listening and attention skills
- use specific ICT programs
- use circle time to encourage social interaction and communication skills
- use specific games and activities to develop social communication skills.

If you have any interesting information or resources which you would like to share with your colleagues via this fortnightly bulletin, please e-mail them to me:

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Many thanks
Anne