



Wakefield Speech Language and Communication (SLC) Strategy 2023 – 2025

Supporting Children and Young People's Voice

Introduction

This strategy sets out the vision, priorities and success measures for effective speech, language and communication (SLC) support from pre-birth to 19 (0-25 for SEND).

Although children develop at their own pace, a child's early language can have an impact on their life chances. Language delay at five years can have implications for children's longer term social emotional learning and economic outcomes.

Speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) are recognised in the SEND code of practice as a special education need to be addressed.

The link between language delay, deprivation, and the wider social determinants of health and wellbeing are well documented. Our strategy builds on the strengths of the child, who is born a communicator.

In Wakefield we believe that parents, and carers, are the most important people in a child's life in terms of making a positive difference to speech, language and communication development at all stages.

Our strategy has been developed for everyone who has a role in supporting children's speech, language, and communication development so children can be supported to ensure they can access learning, social interactions and to make a positive contribution to the world around them.



Background

Communication is a complex skill that develops gradually over time from the moment a child is born. It is important that children develop a firm foundation of earlier skills such as listening and playing so that they can successfully develop later skills such as using tricky sounds and spelling.

Evidence shows that family status impacts on children's speech language and communication with children living in poverty/low-income families hearing less words and with fewer opportunities to develop a rich vocabulary.

“Language development underpins cognitive, education and social development. A child with poor language at 3 years will be at risk unless intervention is taken”
Ref: Prof Edward Melhuish.

Speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) is the term given to describe the extensive range of needs related to all aspects of communication – from understanding others, forming sounds, words and sentences to expressing ideas and emotions and using language socially.

Prevalence of SLCN in the UK in some areas of deprivation/disadvantage, identifies more than 50% of children start school with a SLCN (Talking about a Generation Jean Gross 2017.)

Wakefield's Vision

To provide speech, language and communication opportunities through local community-based guidance and support for children and young people to maximise the child and/or young person's ability to improve their life chances.

Wakefield serves a richly diverse community and to be successful, this strategy must reach and improve the life chances of children and young people across the district, especially those who are vulnerable or have additional educational or health needs.

Our strategy provides a suite of tools to support the development of a whole system approach and is based on good practice supporting Wakefield Council's policy on Education Inclusion which defines the values and principles that will drive practice for children with a learning difficulty and/or disability.

In Wakefield we have the same aspirations and expectations for every child and young person. We want Wakefield to be a place where all children and young people:

- Are happy, healthy and safe
- Are ready and eager to learn
- Are thriving in their communities
- Receive mental enrichment from everyone around them
- Have rich and diverse opportunities and life chances
- Develop resilience and a positive self-image
- Can communicate their views and know they will be listened to
- Are free from poverty and never go hungry
- Live longer, healthier lives

All children, young people and their families should benefit from the Wakefield Families Together approach. This will provide integrated multi-agency support from the earliest opportunity through to adulthood and beyond. Parents need to know what support is available including self-help, know what to expect from universal services and understand the key milestones of children's speech, language, and communication so that they can access the right support at the right time to enable them to make the best choices for their children.

For this strategy to succeed, it recognises that engagement with families, community and voluntary partners across the sector is vital. It will evolve through wide engagement and consultation to ensure that all voices are heard and that contributions are reflected in the work that we do together.

Key Principles

- Everyone has a role to play in the development of children's speech, language and communication
- Environments need to be “communication friendly” for the benefit of all children
- The active involvement of children and the support of their parents are vital – children with SLCN are fully included
- Everyone who works with children will have universal knowledge about SLCN
- Settings, nurseries, schools, and families are supported in relation to a whole system approach

Three Levels of Support

- Universal intervention support the whole population, i.e. self-help and tools for parents/carers to use at home, access guidance advice and local group interventions, whole class or whole setting/ school and ensures all children have appropriate language and communication opportunities. This level includes workforce development, access to appropriate information, creating communication friendly environments and whole class/setting/ school intervention approaches.
- Universal Plus and Targeted Formal interventions offer specific support for those children and young people who are felt to be vulnerable in relation to speech, language and communication. The group is wide ranging and includes children with delayed language and communication skills who, following targeted intervention, will return to the universal level, through to identification of children who may go on to have more persistent needs.
- This level includes small group and individual targeted intervention approaches such as language groups, narrative groups, social communication skills programmes and phonology programmes.
- Specialist Complex interventions are in addition to the universal and targeted offer for those children and young people who require a highly individualised and personalised programme of work. This group includes children with complex learning and communication needs and those children who are cognitively able and have specific speech, language, or communication needs.

Aims

The strategy aims to:

- Offer families tools and resources to promote play, learning and development in the home environment
- Universally, ensure all children have appropriate language and communication opportunities.
- Promote universal services such as libraries and family hubs as opportunities to support and develop SLC skills
- Support community partners to create language and communication friendly environments for families using their services
- Support parents as well as professionals in the identification of and provision for children with SLCN
- Promote early intervention as soon as a need is identified
- Support inclusive practice by promoting adaptations to the learning environment to cater for the needs of children with SLCN
- Support settings/schools in tracking progress and monitoring outcomes
- Promote the active participation of children and their parents in the process
- Signpost sources of further information and support to professionals/ services involved in developing children's speech, language and communication skills
- Provide a procedural structure for referrals and intervention at different levels to help professionals access appropriate support for different types of SLCN
- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of all concerned in this process and to help ensure consistency of response
- Promote the use of a framework to address workforce competences

Identification of SLCN

Identifying SLCN can be problematic for many reasons: children may have other difficulties as well as SLCN, they may have a wide and complex range of needs and therefore there can be co-occurrence with other labels and diagnoses.

SLCN is often considered to be a 'hidden disability'. Some aspects of SLCN are more visible than others, particularly those associated with speech and sounds. Others are less so, for example the child who is experiencing difficulties understanding or using language may appear to be inattentive, passive or even rude. There are children who become very skilled at hiding their disabilities, e.g. by watching other people so they know what to do or by pretending they know when they don't. SLCN may be missed altogether or masked by these other characteristics.

We know that early identification leads to better outcomes for children and young people, so the sooner a need is identified the better.



Whole Nursery/School/ Service Approach

Nurseries, schools and other settings recognise the importance of communication and adopting a whole nursery/setting/school approach to developing every child's speech, language and communication skills. This involves:

- Working in partnership with parents/carers and providing information about developing speech, language and communication skills at home
- Ensuring everyone in the nursery/setting/school is aware of SLCN with some members of staff trained to a higher level of competence
- Creating language and communication friendly environments
- Use of identification tools across all ages to ensure children with SLCN are identified as early as possible
- Whole Nursery/ School/Service Approach' Change last bullet point to- "Provide a range of support across the Continuum of Need; A framework to support decision making:
www.wakefieldscp.org.uk/continuum-of-need

Workforce Development

It is important that everyone who works with children has the appropriate knowledge and skills to promote speech, language and communication development; identify those children who are experiencing difficulties and support children with SLCN.

A comprehensive workforce development plan is essential to include all those involved, both training of the wider workforce as well as ongoing development of specialist staff. This should also include support for services and community partners who work with families to create language and communication friendly environments.

The Speech Language and Communication Framework (SLCF) provides a detailed framework of the skills and knowledge in speech, language and communication which are important for everyone who works with children and young people. The SLCF is an interactive, online tool which provides a detailed and structured breakdown of important skills and knowledge recommended for anyone who works with children with SLCN.

Governance and Accountability

The Children and Young People's Partnership Board which includes representation of key partners, will in turn regularly review the impact of this strategy.

This strategy aligns with:

- [Children and Young People's Plan -2022-2025](#)
- [Early Year Strategy – 2021 -2024](#)
- [SEND Strategy – 2020-2024](#)
- [Healthy Child Programme](#)
- Wakefield Youth Justice Services Strategic Plan 2021-2024 *

*Please contact Wakefield Youth Justice Services for a copy of the plan

Our Priorities

Wakefield Families Together service transformation provides opportunities for shared outcomes, values, principles, and flexible working to support the Speech Language and Communication strategy and its priorities which are:

- Develop a highly effective pathway for communication and language which provides timely intervention and support to close gaps in children's development and to mitigate the impact of poverty and disadvantage.
- Health visiting to evaluate the Early Language Identification Measure (ELIM) screening tool which supports the early identification of speech language and communication needs, making any recommendations which support the wider system.
- Investigate evidence / evidence-based interventions and consider which might be recommended for use across the Wakefield district.
- Develop an effective quality tool to measure progress of children and young people
- Provide parents with the ability to access self-help and early guidance to support speech, language and communication needs
- Develop highly effective models to engage and support parents
- Provide parents with clear and consistent communication when their child is being supported enabling home to setting/nursery/school consistent approach.
- Harness the capacity of the voluntary and community sector
- Implement a workforce development strategy which ensures common understanding across setting/nurseries/schools/childminders and community/voluntary sector which aligns priorities and work streams, establishes common language and ensure pathways of support are clear, understood and accessible.

How we will measure success

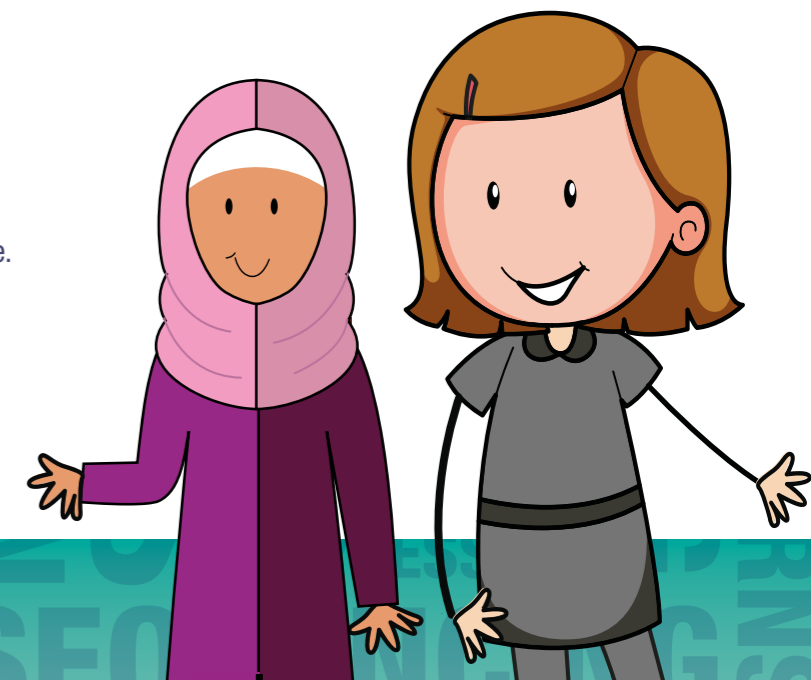
- Parents tell us they can assess support and guidance to play, learning and provide development opportunities in the home.
- Universal play, learning and development opportunities are accessible in local communities
- ELIM evaluated within the health visiting and any recommendations to support the system identified
- Data collection from both 0-19 service following 2 - 2½ year health checks and nursery providers is integrated and shared
- Reduction in the inequality of outcomes for children who are disadvantaged
- % of babies receiving free universal Bookstart resources and SLC messaging
- Number of children receiving free EYTO (Early Years Targeted Offer) Bookstart resources and SLC messaging at age-appropriate gifting points
- Number of babies/children receiving free targeted additional needs Bookstart resources
- % of children under 5 who are library members
- % of children under 18 who are library members
- Increase the number of practitioners signing up to become "50 Things Champions" and embedding within their settings and practice
- % increase in downloading by parents in relation to the "50 Things" App
- % increase in families reporting completion of activities
- % increase in the number of parents registering (identified areas only) with the Imagination Library
- % of children achieving the expected level of development for communication and language, literacy and numeracy at the end of Foundation Stage.
- Workforce development plan in place
- Reduction in the number of children referred to specialist speech language and communication service

Partners Involved in Developing the Strategy

This strategy has been co-produced by partners who work across the Wakefield District. The strategy will be in place from 2022-2025 and will evolve over time. It will also be subject to regular review by the Children and Young People's Partnership Board.

Wakefield Families Together Key partners involved in the delivery of this strategy include:

- Wakefield Council – including Education and Inclusion, Schools Improvement, Early Years, Wakefield Inclusion, SEND Support services (WISESS) including Early Years SEND, Educational Psychology Service including Portage, Child and Family Intervention Team, Education Improvement Teachers, Libraries, Public Health, Health Improvement.
- West Yorkshire ICS Wakefield
- Wakefield 0-19 service
- Schools, Early Years Settings and Childminders
- The Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise Sector
- Mid Yorkshire Hospitals Speech and Language Therapy Team
- Midwifery Services
- Parent and Carer Forum Wakefield.
- Wakefield Families Together Early Years Board



Glossary of Terms

Wakefield 0-19 Service	Provides the Healthy Child Programme, a planned series of public health interventions for children and families from birth to age 19. Services provided within the Integrated 0-19 team include Health Visiting, School Nursing, Infant Feeding Specialist, Infant and Perinatal Mental Health lead, and the Family Nurse Partnership
Children and Young Peoples Partnership Board	Brings together a range of agencies, including the voluntary and community sector and children and young people with the aim to improve the lives of children and young people in Wakefield
Clinical Commissioning Group	Clinically-led groups which include all of the GP groups in the Wakefield district
Early Help	Providing support to a child, young person or their family as soon as a problem emerges, usually coordinated through Children First Hubs www.wakefield.gov.uk/Documents/schools-children/early-help-strategy.pdf
Early Years Strategic Board	A partnership comprising representatives of Wakefield Council, Health and the community and voluntary sector
SEND	Disabled children, young people, and those with special educational needs, and their families will have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partners at all levels working collectively to provide integrated, high quality family centred support; • Recognition of identified needs, removal of barriers, support for aspiration and social inclusion • A focus on building resilience and improving the lived experience for children and young people with SEND and their families
Wakefield Families Together	A vision for children and young people to tell us they are happy, healthy and safe, thriving in communities where families and services work together to help them to achieve their potential and dreams www.wakefieldfamieliestogether.co.uk
Wakefield Safeguarding Partnership	A partnership of all of the relevant statutory, voluntary and community agencies involved in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children and young people in Wakefield. www.wakefieldscp.org.uk