

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales

Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and Education Committee

Ymchwiliad i Addysg a Dysgu Proffesiynol Athrawon | Inquiry into Teachers' Professional Learning and Education

TT 18

Ymateb gan : Afasic Cymru

Response from : Afasic Cymru

## **1. About Afasic Cymru**

- 1.1. Afasic is the UK charity representing children and young people with speech, language and communication needs, working for their inclusion in society and supporting their parents and carers.
- 1.2. Afasic is a member organisation that includes parents, young people with speech and language and communication needs, professionals and others who support us. Afasic Cymru was launched in response to devolution and celebrates its fifteenth anniversary this year.
- 1.3. Our vision is of a society which embraces 'communication' as a basic human right, and where all children and young people up to the age of 25, with speech, language and communication needs, get the support they require to achieve their potential and participate fully in society.

## **2. Information about speech, language and communication needs**

### 2.1 Why are speech, language and communication important?

Speech, language and communication are fundamental life skills. Speech, language and communication skills underpin literacy, learning in school and college, socialising and making friends, and are crucial for employment prospects and understanding and regulating emotions or feelings.

### 2.2 Who needs support?

Many children and young people struggle to communicate. Some of their communication needs are temporary and others have more persisting needs. UK wide studies have shown that approximately 10% of all children have persisting

speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) which may present as a child's main difficulty or it may be associated with other conditions.

### 2.3 What type of support is needed?

A child or young person with SLCN may need support to:

- understand what they hear/read
- learn and remember words, and put words together to make sentences
- be understood and articulate speech clearly
- talk and interact appropriately in social contexts

A child or young person with SLCN may have some or all of the above needs; each individual is different.

### 2.4 Identification

Speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) may be difficult to spot and the nature of the difficulties can change over time. This means that instead of recognising the underlying SLCN, people may see children or young people struggling to read, showing poor behaviour, or having difficulties learning or socialising with others. Put another way, an individual with SLCN may present with 'clear intelligible speech' but still experience difficulties in the other areas of language and communication.

### 2.5 Impact

Children and young people with SLCN typically experience academic, emotional and behavioural difficulties that may impact on their mental health, educational and employment outcomes. Some children and young people may become withdrawn or isolated.

## **3. The context of our response to this inquiry**

3.1 The design and delivery of the new curriculum is an opportunity to improve outcomes for children and young people. The professional education of teachers across the age range is an intrinsic part of this. In our evidence we have drawn on research into children and young people's outcomes and our experience of supporting professional learning including the evaluations from teachers as part of that.

3.2 Speech, language and communication skills are cross-cutting and fundamental to the attachment, learning, literacy, emotional regulation, mental health and wellbeing of all children.

3.3 'Wider skills' such as problem solving, critical and creative thinking, and the ability to apply knowledge in a range of different contexts and behave in effective and appropriate ways, depend on underlying language and communication skills.

3.4 Where difficulties with acquiring speech and language skills arise due to reduced developmental opportunities limiting the child's learning of language. These reduced developmental opportunities are commonly linked to social disadvantage. The links between social disadvantage and speech, language and communication needs run in both directions. Reducing the impact of speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) reduces the impact of poverty.

3.5 SLCN has a knock-on effect on school readiness, literacy and school performance generally. There is evidence from population-based studies that SLCN puts children at risk of a wide range of long term consequences in terms of literacy, mental health and employment.

3.6 A teacher's recognition, understanding and labeling of a child's needs may affect their expectations, assessment of progress and the accuracy of any subsequent identification of an additional learning need.

#### **4 Professional learning and education**

4.1 Teachers need to know how to develop language interactions for all learners including those with specific speech, language and communication needs. This is as relevant for teachers working in Early Years as it is for teachers working with children at Key Stage 4 and beyond. However the current professional learning arrangements for all practitioners, does not prepare them for this critical responsibility.

4.2 We highlight two recommendations from the All Party Parliamentary Group on speech and language difficulties that examined the links between speech, language and communication needs and social disadvantage:

- There should be a comprehensive programme of initial and post qualification training for all relevant practitioners in relation to children's communication needs.
- Systems for monitoring and responding to the development of children's communication skills over time should be improved.

4.3 In our experience of providing awareness raising training to teachers working in the foundation phase, primary, secondary and further education, the majority of teaching staff in these settings had *never* previously received specific training related to speech and language and more importantly related to the following:

- a. The key components of speech, language and communication skills of children and young people across the key stages and beyond.
- b. What to do at a universal level to develop speech, language and communication skills.
- c. How to pro-actively identify children and young people who may have poor underlying oral language and communication skills (but intelligible speech)
- d. How to use all the above information in formative assessment

4.4 We are concerned about the possible reliance on models of collaborative learning within and between schools which depend on the existing levels of expertise in SLCN within a setting. There is a danger of perpetuating poor universal provision and poor outcomes for children and young people with SLCN.

4.5 We are also concerned that there is not a recognition of the relevance of speech and language knowledge and skills for teaching all children and an over-reliance on (an already vastly overstretched) SENCo (or ALNCo) as the only person perceived to have knowledge in this area within an educational setting.

## **5 Assessment**

5.1 The accurate assessment of a child or young person's learning needs is critical to inform strategies and learning approaches. In addition, it enables education providers to fulfill their anticipatory duty under the Equality Act to not wait until a child fails before providing support.

5.2 We note from the final report of an assessment of special educational needs (SEN) workforce development requirements commissioned by the Welsh Government, that the evidence on school' effectiveness in identifying SEN is mixed. Of particular concern are the identified weaknesses in staff skills in relation to assessment and differentiation for all pupils and where staff are likely to overestimate their skills and knowledge. This may directly affect identification of additional learning needs, provision of appropriate teaching and engagement with appropriate professional development.

## **6 Concluding recommendation**

6.1 We believe that research evidence supports the notion that all teachers require speech, language and communication as an essential part of their initial and post qualification education and this would expand their capacity to effectively deliver the new curriculum. We urge the Children and Young People's Education Committee to examine speech and language as part of this inquiry.

## **References**

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