



Speech and Language Development in the Small Specialist Classes at Acre Hall

At Acre Hall, we have been fortunate enough to be supported for many years by Mrs Moran, a highly specialised Speech and Language Therapist, and by Ms Arditti, the Team Lead for the service. Over the years, they have regularly observed our classroom teaching. This has included watching us deliver language focused sessions, looking at our planning and coaching us in the next steps. We have always been re-assured by SALT that what we are doing is delivering many therapy targets via the curriculum.

School staff have worked alongside speech and language therapists for over 25 years and have attended related training in the past. Some of our staff are experienced in different areas of speech such as early language development, Sign Along and British Sign Language, PECS and 'I Can' training (promoting effective communication and language development). We have learned to deliver outcomes in our daily teaching and learning.

ASSESSMENT

If a child is assessed by the Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) team, and they need support, they are placed on a specific pathway and skills and outcomes are identified. The pathways are as follows- Universal, Targeted, Specialist, Intensive.

It is then up to the school and parents to access the relevant training provided by the SALT service: Language Friendly Classrooms, Vocabulary, Narrative, Listening Skills, Lego Therapy, Social Communication, Thinking Skills, ELKLAN as necessary.

Parents and School staff work together to address the EHC Plan outcomes for the children and Mrs Moran monitors each child's progress, re-assesses their needs and provides short reports if needed. If a child has a specific need, we are advised about resources and courses that may prove useful. Sometimes we are provided with a pack of resources to work through at home and school.

Mrs Moran is not able to attend all Annual Review meetings but will sometimes provide an updated report instead.

Due to the increasingly complex nature of some of our children, we are aware that we may sometimes need to update our skills and practices, and Acre Hall staff have welcomed specialist support and attended SALT training to do this. Members of SSC staff have also attended ASD training offered by the Local Authority specialists for Autism.

Parents are also offered the SALT training courses and are encouraged to support this area of their child's development at home. A partnership approach is always more effective and some skills are better approached at home than at school. It also allows skills to be used in different situations and environments.

SCHOOL SUPPORT

Mrs Moran, our highly specialised speech and language therapist, has responsibility for all the Small Classes at

Acre Hall. Her advice and coaching can be accessed at different times during the week, sometimes by email, by phone or by face to face sessions. This support may be through advice, resources, coaching (adult to adult) or modelling a lesson.

We aim to implement new ideas in a group, where possible, bearing in mind that many of the 10 children in a class do have similar needs. For those children that sometimes have a very individual need eg the need for a social story, phonological development needs, PECS, we address these 1:1 in class or through TA support out of class as we deem appropriate. Some children may be given clinic appointments for specific need eg cleft palate or speech sound assessments.

For many years, weekly classroom planning has reflected extended opportunities for speaking and listening and dedicated weekly teaching sessions have covered many aspects of recommended therapy. It is not necessary to have a 'Vocabulary' or 'Narrative Therapy' SALT session weekly. These skills and experiences can be built into our weekly class learning activities. Children do not always need to know that they are 'having Therapy', just like playing a game can actually be maths. Skills need to be transferred to, and practised in a variety of situations.

All the children in the SSCs have an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) and many of them contain recommendations relating to Speech Therapy skills. Whilst the SALT team and EHCP can advise upon the skills and outcomes that have been identified for the children, they do not prescribe how a school will deliver these because all schools are different.

The information below gives some **brief** examples of how we include speech therapy targets in the curriculum at Acre Hall. These are by no means the only things we do. Our creative spaces are a great source of language development whether it is children speaking to children or adults speaking to children.

Listening skills

We play 'pass the message' -The children have to listen to each other and repeat information from a friend, such as 'I like fish and chips for tea' or 'I like watching Shrek.'

Answering simple question or following simple instructions asked by adults and peers, whilst also following the instruction to look and listen to who is speaking.

Processing skills are developed through verbal instructions given in short phrases before the next step eg 'Get a red pen....draw a big circle...write your name in the circle.

We might tap our heads gently whilst repeating an instruction to help some things 'stick' eg 'Go and get your coat'.

Guiding looking and listening with a big picture. 'Point to the man with the dog.'

English, Maths, topic lessons regularly involve listening tasks- Can you find the yellow circle? What is the man with the hat doing? Tell me what the penguin is eating?

In KS2, we may read an extended class novel, requiring children to attend closely and recall previously heard chapters and events.

As the children mature, we introduce regular debating topics such as 'What is the best super power to have?'

We also ask children to work in groups and with a partner to provide information. This involves listening to many opinions and 'sifting' out the important points to present.

Children are involved in turn taking presentations so must listen to what the person before them has said to avoid repetition or misinformation.

Vocabulary skills

Vocabulary is developed through modelling correct object names, naming categories and sorting real objects, photos and pictures.

Children are asked to describe and identify real objects and pictures from a selection. They may listen to an instruction such as 'Can you find a fruit?', 'Can you put all the clothes together?' We are always looking for opportunities to enrich vocabulary and children often use topic words or quite adult words picked up through conversation with good role models. We would always explain what complex words mean eg perseverance, independent. These things are done on a daily basis in the moment.

Older children are encouraged to use the correct English and Mathematical terms and the correct vocabulary from Topic lessons.

Language Friendly classrooms

This does not necessarily relate to spoken language and is supported in many different ways in class and around school.

Many of it is firmly established eg visual time tables, lanyards with symbols, now/next boards and written instructions.

Our areas are arranged to allow children to speak, interact or mark make, with one other child or in a small group. We add interesting resources to areas to spark conversation and imagination. We arrange spaces so that children can just read, or sit and talk, or explore written instructions, and vocabulary is appropriately placed around the room.

We plan lessons so that partner work and group work encourage discussion, explanation and questioning skills. Art/DT/Construction sessions also offer increased opportunities for children to explain, question and reflect upon their learning. The children will often speak to a wider group of peers when involved in this practical learning.

Narrative Therapy

This is often addressed through reading and writing making sure that the children can identify who, what, where, why, when in their work. This is a huge focus for all our children, who will often start telling us about something half way through and without giving us any clues.

We may use our Narrative bags with pictures in eg a 'Who' bag contains lots of character photos and pictures and a 'Where' bag contains pictures of different settings. We then make up oral stories using these ideas for guidance and to help sequence information.

The story box is used with 3 or 4 things inside it. A child volunteers to open the box and make up a short story based on these items.

News reporting also involves providing the who, what , where information.

Many lessons involve the sequencing of events, necessary to understand a narrative eg ordering the frogspawn to frog photos, telling a story via dance movements, or learning the rules of a game.

Thinking skills

These skills are developed through many areas of the curriculum. Children are regularly involved in talking about pictures, stories and concepts such as shape (making patterns), size (ordering) and measurement (comparison).

Children are given opportunities to develop problem solving skills in science, maths and during daily routines eg have we got enough bottles of milk? What do you think will happen next..?

Our children often pick up on the less important things in an instruction or on a picture. Sometimes they notice a tiny worm sticking it's head up out of the ground but miss the main point of a picture. They hear a tiny part of an instruction but not the main point. We need to help children look for the important aspects of a task.

Children of all ages struggle with inference. A child might ask if they need a coat and we might reply 'It's very cold outside.' Some children will know that this is acknowledging the need for a coat, others will wonder why we are telling them about the weather.

Allowing children the independence to solve their own problems is an important aspect of developing thinking skills. Children need to be able to understand the cause and effect of their actions/decisions or make predictions based upon knowledge and experiences they have. Eg 'I can't find my lunch box and it's time to go home...where could it be? What should I do? Will it matter if...? Next time I need to...'

ASD

Many of the ideas in Language friendly classrooms and Social Communication address this need. Several staff have attended training about writing social stories which are useful for many pupils. These are written in school when necessary and can also be used for parents to support at home. The training also covered a basic introduction to ASD and how language may be processed differently. We have received some coaching and advice from SALT and the ASD specialist for adding even more ideas to our provision and for catering to specific needs.

We have recently begun to develop our understanding of pupils who are showing aspects of Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA) and all the complexities of language that surround this condition.

Social Communication

These skills are addressed daily with our children via our curriculum and daily activities.’ Are we talking about the same thing?’ ‘How do I know you are talking to me?’ We model the rules of conversation- eye contact, attention, body language etc. We teach them, model them and check them in the moment as the communication is happening. We may sabotage communication, by ignoring, so that a child has to think about what to do next. Teaching and learning sessions of this focus have been observed regularly in school because many of our children benefit from them.

Our children can be very direct/truthful and do not understand about subtlety or the emotional impact a statement might have. Our children are very self-interested. We discuss how we speak to people. Is it kind to say something that might hurt someone’s feelings? Telling someone that you don’t like the picture on their jumper can really upset them, especially if it’s a favourite item. This can also be addressed through listening skills and understanding that people have different likes/dislikes and opinions. Empathy is difficult concept but still needs to be developed where possible. These things are often addressed in the moment, but can be approached via group discussion, relating issues to photos and scenarios rather than making a personal link.

Intervention based upon published schemes such as 'Circle of friends' and 'Social Use of Language Program' (SULP) are sometimes used. They provide a range of strategies to enhance the inclusion, in a mainstream setting, of any young person. Other children in the mainstream peer group are encouraged to look at their own behaviour while developing an understanding of the focus child's behaviour and difficulties. We aim to help them develop strategies and practical solutions to help the individual. Peers are often very aware of the needs of other children having shared lesson and social time with them. Some pupils have naturally developed positive support strategies for classmates. It is also hoped that the focus child will be able to build closer and better relationships with other children. Some pupils are happy to be identified as helpers and may even wear a badge saying 'Happy to help' or 'pupil mentor'. They may guide our children towards making good decisions and may advise about expected behaviours and interactions. (This also applies to the ASD section above.)

Lego Therapy

Mrs Moran gave a Lego therapy training to all SSC staff a couple of years ago. Lego therapy is a specific group activity that has proved very successful because it can interest some previously disengaged pupils due to the popularity of the Lego itself. The main skills behind this therapy idea are to be able to listen, wait, focus, co-operate, take turns and sequence instructions. These skills can be addressed in other ways. We use bespoke resources for this using duplo because it is easier to manipulate. We also cover the same skills when model making together using other construction kits and have even address them through junk modelling and craft lessons. We also use Lego Therapy skills and dynamics in PE lessons, Maths and English.

Speaking to an audience and performing.

Our weekly planning includes extended opportunities for speaking and listening, performing and presenting. Children give reports about their learning, express opinions, share ideas about planning an event or story and learn and recite poems and short stories. They may role play in a provision area or may act out a part from a

well-known tale.

Sometimes we record our performances and play them back. We ask what we did well and what we could do better. We discuss eye contact, engagement, movement and expression. The children are surprisingly good at this and really enjoy trying to improve a performance.

Class assemblies and school plays give our children opportunities to speak to a larger audience. Children from the SSCs are always involved in our school plays and also have weekly lessons with our music specialist to promote confidence through performing songs and music.

We hope this has given you a better understanding of what Speech and Language Therapy/Development looks like at Acre Hall. Mrs Moran and school staff are happy to help with resources and ideas for you to implement at home.