

Meeting the challenge of the SEN Reforms in Kirkby: a practical case study for children with communication needs (New)

A Chance to Talk and the SEN reforms

Background/ Context

Designed to produce better life chances for children with SEN, the implementation of the reforms presents a significant challenge to statutory agencies and the voluntary sector. *A Chance to Talk*, developed by I CAN^{viii} with [The Communication Trust](#)^{ix} and the [Every Child a Chance Trust](#)^x, demonstrates how integrating approaches across health and education, using the key SEN reform strategies of joint commissioning, person-centred planning and targeted staff training, delivers good outcomes for children with Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN). Kirkby, a town in the Metropolitan Borough of Knowsley, benefitted from all of these outcomes through involvement in its pilot.

What is A Chance to Talk?

A Chance to Talk (ACTT) is a whole school commissioning model for supporting speech and language development at key stage 1. Primary schools can use it to help children who have speech and language needs through effective joint working with NHS Speech and Language Therapy.

What is the impact of A Chance to Talk?

I CAN worked with primary schools across Rochdale, Gravesham, Whitby and Kirkby – all areas of significant social deprivation - to develop a systematic school-based approach to commissioning speech and language support.

Kirkby, is largely white and English speaking and the town has one of the highest scores in England in indices of overall deprivation, unemployment and health and disability. Schools from the Kirkby Collaborative of schools were invited to put themselves forward for inclusion in the project; 7 schools took part in the project supporting a total of 2,461 pupils.

The Speech and Language Therapist was seconded to the ACTT project from the 5 Boroughs Partnership NHS Foundation Trust. Results were impressive:

- Schools who took on a whole school approach to supporting speech, language and communication, showed enhanced progress in reading at key stage 1. In Kirkby schools with complete sets of data for school years 1 and 2, children made, on average, 40% more progress than in previous years after ACTT had been implemented in schools. This exceeded the progress expected nationally for their age group.

- Children with delayed language who had the *Talk Boost* intervention in Kirkby schools made significant progress, ranging from 9 to 12 months following the 10 week intervention. Across the pilot areas, up to 80% caught up with their peers with typical levels of language. Children with English as an additional language and those on free school meals had lower starting points, and also made significant progress.
- For children with SLCN, ACTT had a high impact. Schools and parents in Kirkby reported that children with SLCN had better speech, language and communication skills, found learning in the classroom easier, and were noticeably more confident and sociable.

A quote from the Deputy Head: “We had grave concerns about him, this child hardly spoke, he had really poor expressive and receptive language delays and now he never stops talking. He’s chat, chat, chat and he’s coming up to Year 3 and he’s actually moving up to the year group he should be with, without support”

How does A Chance to Talk work?

Using commissioning guidelines developed by I CAN, clusters of primary schools access appropriate language development training and support for their staff and join together to commission an NHS Speech and Language therapist. SLT expertise is available to children with SLCN across the cluster. Training teachers and teaching assistants in how to develop children’s language skills is central to *A Chance to Talk*.

Wave 1 ‘universal level’	Training and development for all school staff, equipping them deliver high quality class teaching in a language-rich environment which promotes all children’s language development	All children
Wave 2 ‘targeted level’	Teaching assistants trained to deliver a targeted intervention ‘ <i>Talk Boost</i> ’ to small groups of children with language delay. Activities from the intervention are reinforced in the classroom.	Children with ‘delayed language’ just below what is expected for their age
Wave 3 ‘specialist level’	An NHS speech and language therapist works across the schools in the cluster. Intensive intervention to individual children or groups with support for school staff.	Children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN)

What did parents think?

In Kirkby, parents of children with SLCN were 'highly satisfied' with *A Chance to Talk's* school based model for speech and language therapy and interventions. Children who would otherwise not get to clinic were able to access SLT support on a regular basis.

What did Head Teachers and Therapy Managers think?

Head Teachers and speech and language therapy service managers found ACTT an effective, value-for-money commissioning model for developing all children's speech, language and communication, as well as for children with SLCN.

Why is it important?

Effective speech, language and communication skills underpin children's learning and social development. SLCN is the most prevalent Special Educational Need in the UK amongst primary-aged children. Numbers are increasing: in areas of social disadvantage, upwards of 50% of children start school with poor language.

In Kirby, schools identified a number of factors which made the focusing on children's language a key issue:

- High levels of children coming into school with speech, language and communication needs
- Long waiting lists for Speech and Language Therapy (SLT)

- Missed SLT appointments resulting in automatic discharge without children's needs being met
- Recognition of the need to develop knowledge and skills within the school so that children could be supported within the classroom and that those who needed further support could be quickly and accurately spotted.

The impact of SLCN can be wide-ranging and long-term. Children's communication difficulties are a barrier to accessing the curriculum and developing emotional and social skills they need for a successful experience at school. Yet teaching and other school staff consistently report a lack of confidence in knowing how to support children's speech and language development – something that *A Chance to Talk* addresses successfully.

Find out more

In Kirkby, the schools have commissioned a continuation of the model: testament to the achievement they feel ACTT has secured for their pupils.

To find out more about schools can get involved, please click on the following link: www.ican.org.uk/achancetotalk.