

**DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL  
JAR CASE STUDIES**

**CROSS CUTTING CASE  
STUDY 1**

**‘Communities of Learning’**

*‘Meeting the needs of vulnerable and hard to reach  
children, young people and their families’*



## Background

In 2004, 14 Communities of Learning (CoLs) were established. CoLs are clusters of schools working in partnership with the local authority (LA) and other agencies, promoting inclusion and raising achievement. All schools belong to a CoL. They have devolved decision making powers and funding which is targeted to meet the needs of children and young people with special educational needs. The shared intention is to enable local solutions and shared learning which will lead to improved outcomes.

The external evaluation, “Communities of Learning – The First Two Years” (KSA Partnership 2004) provided a clear indication that, “the Communities of Learning model works and has the potential to work better” and is, “making a difference to individual children and young people”.

Speech and Language is one strand of CoL development.

CoLs started their operations in 2004 by auditing needs and skills. The first audit identified a number of priorities for development and action planning. Speech, language and communication emerged as a high priority for all fourteen CoLs, and strategic dialogue between the LA, schools and Speech and Language Therapy Departments in the five Primary Care Trusts operating at that time, commenced immediately in order to co-ordinate and support developments and maximise impact. This joint working to meet identified priorities has proved hugely beneficial at strategic and operational levels and is ongoing.

## What has been done?

### • Developing the workforce

CoLs have worked closely with Speech and Language Therapy departments to invest in developing a skilled and targeted staffing resource. Currently 2.5 FTE Speech and Language Therapy Technicians, 11 FTE Speech and Language Therapy Assistants and 3.0 FTE Speech and Language Therapists have been appointed to the Primary Care Trust and paid for by the CoLs. A service level agreement specifies the nature of the work required by each CoL.

### • Enhancement and sharing of existing projects

The increased staffing capacity has enhanced the implementation of existing programmes like Speech and Language Link, Hanen, COGs and Elkan and a balance of sustainable interventions and approaches are employed. Some focus on individual students and their families and others provide continuing professional development opportunities for school staff, helping them to acquire enhanced skills in relation to speech and language and increasing their own capability to sustain improved working.

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- **Speech and Language Link**

Speech and Language Link has been purchased by all CoLs and has been rolled out across the county. These are multimedia packages developed by speech and language therapists and consist of a speech screening tool and printable resources for use in schools and/ or at home. Language Link is for children in reception classes. The programme is fully endorsed by Speech and Language Therapy departments in Durham and has been cited as 'partnership working in action' by those involved. Implementation of the programme enables teaching staff to provide targeted support to benefit identified children and young people whilst also assisting in improving the appropriacy of referrals to mainstream speech and language therapy services.

### **What has been achieved?**

A multi-layered approach to monitoring and evaluating this aspect of CoL development has been adopted to enable an assessment of impact at pupil, family, school, service, CoL and whole LA level over time. This cumulative approach is ongoing but impact at different levels on children and personnel working with them, is clearly evident. Some examples of current and anticipated evidence are provided below.

- **The external evaluation report** referred to previously, noted in 2006, the significant input to speech and language by CoLs and found, "early indications that these inputs, mainly appointments and training – are having an effect and should, over time if backed by cumulative evidence, provide value for money".

- **An early evaluation of the impact of Speech and Language Link in CoL 13** as a representative sample of schools was undertaken in order to see whether, and in which ways, Speech and Language Link are enhancing, empowering and supporting schools in improving outcomes. The evaluation also considered the needs of teachers and LSAs in carrying out the prescribed speech and language assessments and interventions. A summary of the key outcomes are provided below. These have informed the implementation.

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## Summary

### Speech Link, Language Link

- Boosted confidence in the area of **speech** difficulties, including referrals.
- More training needed in identifying **speech** sounds.
- Resources could be improved.
- Confidence re referrals greatly increased.
- Has assisted in raising awareness of language problems.
- Has brought considerable benefits.

### Speech Link and Language Link

- Very enthusiastic response to training.
- Teachers & LSAs content for this to become part of their remit.
- Mainly LSAs carrying out screens and programmes/nurture groups.
- User-friendly.
- Print-outs provide useful concrete evidence to show parents.
- Majority would like parents to be involved in delivering programmes in the future.
- Children's responses to both packages very positive.
- Majority can see long term gains in using Speech/Language Link and would recommend them to other schools.

• Speech Link Multimedia, the software developers, has provided schools with an individual analysis relating to the outcomes of the Language Link assessments for children in reception. The baseline assessment and analysis enable schools to differentiate the curriculum at an appropriate language level, thereby improving access for all reception class children and also to track children's progress and skilling up the children's workforce of the future. This school level baseline assessment data has been collated by Speech Link Multimedia to provide LA wide baseline information for strategic planning and tracking impact across and within Communities of Learning.

• There has been negligible impact on the number of speech and language therapy referrals; however the **quality of referral information has improved**. Teaching staff have been empowered through learning, to differentiate between a speech and/ or language difficulty. Teaching staff and parents have the resources to delivery speech and language programmes for identified children immediately rather than having to wait for a therapist assessment.

• **Improved speech and language therapy service working with schools** – this has been a powerful impact – joint planning and delivery of training, teaching assistants and speech and language therapy assistants learning together towards a shared goal. Speech and language link has been a 'common reference point' during communicating matters training. Particularly with regard to speech link, teaching staff are actively seeking out additional learning around delivery of programmes.

• **Evidence of staff increasing confidence** includes quotes from evaluations include: 'can't wait to get started, fantastic ideas. Great resource', 'I can't wait to put these training programs into practice! One of the most useful training days – well done! Overall, Language Link was better received than Speech Link. Both had a number of positive and negative aspects expressed about them by the interviewees