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SpeechLink Project Evaluation – Summer Term 2006- Summer Term 2007

The Learning Support Service in conjunction with the Speech and Language Therapy Service ran a pilot of the SpeechLink programme in the academic year from 2006-2007. Ten Primary schools from within the Thrybergh and Aston areas of Rotherham were invited to participate in the project. Schools were selected from those supported by Hilary Bryce and Julie Green, LSS teachers, working alongside Kara Wildsmith and Janet Shields, Speech Therapists working in the same locality as LSS teachers. The cost of the programme was met by LSS. The Education Action Zone agreed to fund half the cost for the schools in the Thrybergh area.

Schools participating in the Speechlink Pilot:

Thrybergh Primary	Aston Lodge Primary
Thrybergh St. Gerard's	Aston Springwood Primary
Thrybergh Fullerton C. of E. J&I	Aughton Primary
Dalton Foljambe Primary	Swallownest Primary
High Greave Infant	
Trinity Croft C.of E.	

SpeechLink

is a computer based assessment tool administered to Key Stage 1 learners by trained Teaching Assistants which:

- allows schools to screen learners who display developmental speech difficulties and implement speech sound programmes for them
- identifies learners requiring a school based speech sound programme, and those requiring referral to the Speech and Language Therapy Service in the future
- assists schools in prioritising which learners need immediate referral to a Speech and Language Therapist, making effective and efficient use of resources
- provides guidance and materials to support school based interventions (Wave 3)
- provides a web link to Speech and Language Therapists who will provide support to participating schools.

Involvement in the pilot required the participating schools to commit to:

- attendance at an introductory presentation about the programme
- identification of two Teaching Assistants to participate in the programme
- the two identified Teaching Assistants to be released to attend a full day's training in the LA held on 20th March 2006. (Headteachers and SENCos were also invited to attend the first part of this session.)
- attendance at an additional training session provided by Kara Wildsmith and Janet Shields, the Speech and Language therapists taking part in this project
- timetable the identified Teaching Assistants to undertake assessments, prepare, deliver and review speech and language programmes as required
- contribute to an evaluation of the project.

The Learning Support Service agreed to:

- organise and fund the initial training @ £1000 for the day, plus venue and buffet
- match fund, with the Thrybergh EAZ, the cost of 6 packs of SpeechLink @ £400 per pack
- fund 4 packs of SpeechLink @ £400 per pack for 4 Aston schools
- fund 2 further packs of SpeechLink for LSS use @ £400 per pack
- fund release time for the TAs to cover the initial training and half termly network meetings to review the progress of the project
- commit time from 2 LSS teachers, Hilary Bryce and Julie Green to support the implementation, monitoring, reviewing and evaluation of the impact of the project at child, school and Service level
- report the impact of the project to the LA.

The Speech and Language Therapy Service agreed to:

- attend initial training
- work collaboratively with the Learning Support Service in delivery and evaluation of the pilot
- work with Teaching Assistants to ensure assessments are undertaken correctly
- attend network meetings
- provide support and advice to participating Teaching Assistants via email
- contribute to the review and evaluation of the project.

Evaluation

The evaluation has been completed jointly, with Speech and Language therapists taking responsibility for reporting on the statistics and children's progress and the Learning Support Service evaluating the school, parent and pupil views elicited from the questionnaires and review meetings.

Each school was provided with a series of questionnaires which were to be completed at various times throughout the pilot period.

The intervention was to be implemented over a ten week period, with each identified child accessing three twenty minute sessions per week. The assessment identified specific learning objectives and provided detailed instructions and resource materials to support each individual programme.

Support for the project was ongoing through access to time with LSS teachers who visited all schools either weekly or fortnightly.

Access to advice from Speech Therapists on negotiated visits to school and via the website facility which offered a regular opportunity to liaise with them whenever they had a problem

Teaching Assistants were asked to comment on several areas of the child's development at three specific times.

- Before the programme ,
 - At the ten week review,
 - After the Speechlink programme had been completed.
- Sample comments are reflected below.

Clarity of Speech:

Before Speech Link Programme:

- I do understand most of the child's speech, but do ask him to repeat some words
- Speech is quiet, but understandable
- I understand him sometimes
- Certain sounds are unclear , but can be understood
- Majority of speech is unclear. Very difficult to understand most of the time
- Difficult to understand when he's excited

After Speechlink:

- Don't understand all sounds, especially 'h'
- Still quiet, but can be understood
- Has improved generally with speech
- Improved pronunciation when working 1to1. Not really generalising yet
- Has made good progress. Will continue to work with him next term on new sounds

- consciously makes an effort to say 'k' and 'g', but other sounds may need to be worked on at a later date
- speech more intelligible in general
- in the sessions he can articulate the sounds, but needs to transfer them
- more aware of the need to speak clearly when talking to someone.

Confidence:

Before:

- Will speak to friends, but more reluctant to speak out in a group
- Is confident in small groups
- Confidence is quite high, but struggles with some sounds and tries to hide it
- Confident when speaking to friends, but less confident speaking to staff and in group situations
- OK in small circle of friends. Has to be prompted to speak out in a group
- Very confident

After:

- Beginning to show more confidence when working in class.
- Progress has been steady. Has had a speaking part in school play. Will now put up hand and offer an answer in a large group.
- Increased confidence in speaking out in whole class groups. Volunteers information
- Much the same in whole class, although can say the sounds eventually in 1-1
- Speaks out when asked in circle time. Has a tendency to talk a lot within a group situation

Listening / Attention

Before:

- Concentration very low in whole class though can follow instructions
- Needs to be given instructions more than once
- Can sometimes be distracted by others
- Has a short concentration span generally, although enjoys story time

After:

- Tries to focus on the sounds we have been learning when speaking
- Has tried really hard to concentrate when we have been working. Is really pleased when he can say new sounds
- As previously written
- Can now sit and listen to a story and shows a basic understanding. Now follows instructions well

Use of Language:

Before:

- Speaks in single sentences. Uses non verbal cues. Unable to keep conversation flowing
- Uses phrases mainly. Tries to use sentences but difficult to understand.
- Does use sentences but hesitates. Not all words are understood by listener
- Speaks in single words and phrases
- Speaks in sentences, but very fast and difficult to understand
- Misses out small words i.e. 'the' 'he'

After:

- Continues to be a boy of few words, but speech is clearer
- Attempting to speak more. Still needs more work on some of the sounds not able to be covered during the period
- Great effort when trying new sounds. Enthusiastic about working on the programme.
- Sometimes speaks in simple sentences now
- Needs to speak slower now
- Can speak in simple sentences, though still needs prompting

Literacy Skills:

Before:

- Recognises most of the alphabet. Below average in reading
- No letter recognition
- Recognises 19/26 letters
- Recognises 2 letters initial letter from own name and that of sibling No interest in reading
- Poor letter recognition and literacy skills
- Spellings poor
- Can recognize all 26 letters, but not all 44 phonemes

After:

- Now knows all of the alphabet. Beginning to segment and blend
- Recognises 4 letters
- Now recognizes 25/26 letters. Has moved up a level in reading
- Recognises all sounds. Very eager to read now
- Can now hear and say the sounds in isolation, but still finding it difficult to transfer them into words
- Can recognize some of the phonemes now
- Improved from level P8 in reading to level 1b

Class Teachers were asked to comment on the following:

What do you feel the child has gained from being involved in the project?

- Child has improved both in reading and writing skills. Now hears and can write initial sounds in words, and is trying now to use final and medial sounds. Speech is clearer
- Child has enjoyed the activities
- Child has become slightly more confident in class
- Child has gained in confidence when speaking to others that she is less familiar with
- Child can form 'sh' sounds, and has enjoyed the activities
- Child's speech has improved more than with purely outside therapy
- Child's confidence has improved, and so has her literacy skills
- Child had been recommended for speech therapy before, but parent had not taken him to appointments. He has been able to access appropriate programmes through Speechlink, and is making noticeable progress with his speech. He is also really enjoying the activities

Do you think speech link has impacted upon the child's progress in the classroom?

- Yes .Improved literacy skills
- Child now volunteers answers in class situations, and demonstrates his knowledge and understanding
- No, although child has recently had hearing difficulties identified, so these will have contributed to the lack of progress
- No
- Yes. It has improved her phonic skills in class
- Reading has improved from P8 to 1c
- More confident in class. Listens more carefully and tries to incorporate sounds learned in Speechlink when speaking and sounding out simple words in literacy

Has it been easy to incorporate the Speechlink programme into your timetable?

- No problems for class teacher, although TA struggled to make time.
- No problem
- It has been difficult due to only having one other member of staff in a busy foundation stage year one class, although we made it a priority due to the commitment made to both services, and have seen good results.
- Relatively easy to incorporate into my normal timetable.

Have you been involved in helping the child? If so please describe what you did:

- Yes. Differentiating work and support in small group activities
- Yes. Liaison with TA. Planning together each week. Discussing activities with TA and child so we could prompt in class as well as when working one to one.
- Yes. Child now on SEN register. Will monitor progress with speech and language, and hearing.
- Differentiating work and support in small groups

Class Teachers

Class teachers were also asked whether they felt their own skills had developed in relation to identifying children with speech and language difficulties.

We found that staff who had been part of the initial Speechlink training i.e. SENCOs felt more confident in their own ability to use the programme to support and action appropriate intervention using speech link. Where children were targeted from classes where the teachers had not had the direct training, some of the responses were less enthusiastic.

Parents:

Parents were asked to comment upon any difference noticed in their child's speech following the programme.

All responses returned were positive indicating the child's enjoyment of the intervention and an improvement in speech production.

The involvement of parents was encouraged from the start via discussion and provision of an information leaflet with a permission slip which they signed to record consent for the child to access the programme in school. Each child was reviewed at the end of the ten weeks, and parents were invited to give their comments regarding any differences noticed in their child's speech. Some of the pupils had been provided with homework activities using Speechlink resources. Those who did use the resources and activities provided from the programme provided positive feedback:

- I have used the pictures sent home from school
- I Had good support from school
- I can help my child at home
- I have gained knowledge of how to work with my child at home and give them more support
- I've not joined in that much, just done a few games at home
- I encourage my child to speak slower
- I can make out all his words now most of the time
- My child's speech is clearer, but he still needs help. I am able to do this at home.
- We have been involved more in what our child has done. Child has talked about the activities at home and has become more aware of the letter sounds he should be using
- We are really pleased with the support our child has had from school
- Child is thinking about sounds before saying them and self correcting at home.
- Now knows when making correct sounds
- My child is now helping the next child who is working on the programme
- Her speech is a lot better and she is more aware of sounds in words
- Her spellings are better since being on Speechlink

Speechlink Worked well where:

- Head teachers and stayed true to the commitment made to both services, and ensured that staff were well informed about the programme
- The class teacher had been involved in the initial Speechlink training, and had prioritized the intervention as an integral part of pupil progress
- Class teachers were enthusiastic about the value of the programme, and allowed TAs time to assess, resource and implement the sessions, and liaise with LSS and Speech Therapists.
- Teachers and TAs discussed the programme, and monitored the child's use of identified sounds in everyday speaking and listening situations, noticing whether progress made was being generalized into all speaking situations

Difficulties arose where:

- The commitment made to the project was not evident in schools practice
- Class Teachers felt unable to afford TA time to the project
- Class teachers had not been briefed about the pilot, or received any prior training in the outline of the project so and did not feel the need to commit to it
- The TAs who had been involved in the initial training, and were to implement the initiative left to take up other posts
- New head teachers took up post in two of the identified schools They had not been the ones who had committed to the project. In these instances, Speechlink was not the immediate priority, and was temporarily put on hold,
- The TAs trained were also involved in the delivery of many other initiatives in school, and struggled to fit in the agreed number of sessions
- Some identified TAs having HLTA status, and being used to cover PPA time, leaving little free time to carry out Speechlink

Next Steps in the identified Schools and beyond:

- LSS have funded the licence in the 10 identified schools for this academic year.
- Need for LSS and Speech Therapists to offer training for more staff, including class teachers and TAs, to raise the profile in school and promote the use of Speechlink for screening and supporting pupils who experience difficulties with speech and language development,
- Promoting use of Speechlink as a tool for identifying appropriate referrals to the Speech Therapy Service, and as a specialist approved wave 3 intervention that can be used in Key Stage one for pupils who may just require a programme of discrete activities to improve language production.
- LSS and Speech Therapy service to demonstrate Speechlink and share the results of this pilot study at the next local authority SENCO training day
- Both services to present findings to Headteachers and encourage more schools to consider purchasing Speechlink

