Addendum to I CAN Submission to the Oracy APPG June 2020

I CAN is the leading organisation for children and young people's communication. We develop and deliver programmes to support pupils' communication and language aged 0-19. I CAN also runs two outstanding specialist schools for children and young people with severe communication needs.

I CAN welcomes the Oracy APPG inquiry. For too long we have been concerned about the position of spoken language in the current education system: in the school curriculum, and in the accountability system. This is despite strong evidence to show the role of language in literacy development, in learning, social and emotional development and in emotional regulation.

In our previous submission in September 2019 we outlined the issue of speech, language and communication needs and the impact of unmet need on children and young people in terms of both their academic attainment and their social and emotional development. We drew the attention of the Oracy APPG to the evidence showing the links between speech, language and communication needs and social disadvantage.

Since our submission the onset of Covid 19 and the actions taken by government and society at large in response to the pandemic have had a significant impact on the lives of all children and young people across the world.

The majority of pupils have missed over a third of the school year to date. Taking the summer holidays into account, it's been estimated that the 'covid slide' could result in pupils returning to school having made only 70% progress compared to a normal year in reading and only 50% in Maths[1].

I CAN is concerned particularly about the impact of two aspects of the current crisis on children and young people with speech, language and communication needs:

- Access to digital learning
- The curriculum focus when children and young people return to educational settings

Access to digital learning

With many schools shifting to online teaching and learning there has been an increase in emphasis on oral language skills and an increase in the challenge of communication via online platforms rather than face to face. For some teachers this has given them the opportunity to develop relationships with individual pupils which they may not have done in a busy classroom. This positive aspect is not

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[1] Collaborative for Student Growth: the Covid slide
https://onedrive.live.com/?authkey=%21AIls2Al9OQ2EoVE&cid=63DE59B2A5BB1DC6&id=63DE59B2A5BB1DC6%2111512&parId=63DE59B2A5BB1DC6%2111201&o=OneUp

the experience of all children though, according to a survey by Teach First[2] 98% of teachers report that some of their pupils do not have access to technology which cuts them off from any educational opportunity and contact with teachers and peers while they are at home.

There is an emerging body of evidence[3] which points to the difference in impact between online learning and remote teaching. Remote teaching which involves an exchange between teacher and pupil and retains some of the interactivity of the classroom has been shown to be effective for many children and young people. Having speech, language and communication needs however can present a barrier to access in particular for online learning but also for remote teaching unless the teacher has the skills and knowledge to compensate for any barriers a child or young person may be facing.

Interacting online presents a challenge for all of us and particularly for those with poor communication skills, including difficulty with taking turns and so knowing when to speak and the absence of eye contact. Support for new ways of communicating and awareness of these challenges needs to form part of teachers' online interaction with pupils.

Recommendation:

Remote support for children and young people who remain at home should take the form of online teaching including interaction with a teacher. Teachers need to be aware of speech, language and communication needs, how common it is (1 in 10 children and young people[4] and how to support children with SLCN to access remote learning.

The social disadvantage gap is another area which has been the subject of discussion in recent months with concerns rising that the impact on children and young people growing up in disadvantaged communities will be disproportionately greater than for their better off peers. Speech, language and communication needs are more than twice as likely to occur in the disadvantaged population[5]. The effect of the Covid-19 response has had a two-fold impact on these children and young people. Many will have been cut off from access to the communication supportive environments of early years settings and school, and a lack of language stimulation at

[2]

https://www.teachfirst.org.uk/press-release/only-2-teachers-working-most-disadvantaged-communities-believe-all-their-pupils-have
[3] Education Endowment Fund Rapid Review of Distance Learning
https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/evidence-reviews/distance-learning-rapid-evidence-assessment/?utm_source=site&utm_medium=search&utm_campaign=site_search&search_term=Distance%20Learning
[4] Norbury et al (2016) *The impact of nonverbal ability on prevalence and clinical presentation of language disorder: evidence from a population study.* Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry

[5] Dockrell, J., Ricketts, J. and Lindsay, G. (2012) *Understanding speech, language and communication needs: Profiles of need and provision* BCRP

home will have exacerbated the gaps in terms of vocabulary and language complexity which we know already exist.[6]

Recommendations:

Parents need to be supported to understand the importance of speech, language and communication and given knowledge and tools to support its development in their children.

Children living in areas of disadvantage are less likely to have access to technology to support their online learning and their parents are more likely to feel unskilled in supporting them to learn. This is particularly a challenge for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs. We have heard from colleagues working in early years in Liverpool and Knowsley of families who have one device which is shared by the whole household, frequently this is a smart phone with a broken screen and often the data packages which households can afford are very limited.

Recommendation:

Children and young people should have access to technology which supports their online learning. Work set by teachers should include tasks which encourage and develop speech, language and communication skills.

The 'Recovery Curriculum'

Now that children and young people are starting to attend school in larger numbers and with the anticipated return for almost all children in the autumn, attention has turned to what the curriculum focus should be. For all of our young people this period has been one of loss in one form or another, the loss of peer interaction and the normal routine for all, the pain of separation and bereavement for others. Many children will be returning to school having lost loved ones or with the worry of family members being unwell. A focus on wellbeing and support as they transition back to school is at the forefront of many schools' planning. Including support for children's speech, language and communication will be a vital component of this.

We know that speech, language and communication skills are a key part of supporting children's resilience and that the incidence of Social Emotional and Mental Health issues is higher in children and young people with speech, language and communication needs[7]. Social isolation will have had an effect on both mental health and language opportunities, and we know that for adolescents in particular the interaction with their peers is vital. Many children and young people will need support to learn or re-learn the social communication skills which they need to participate in group and class work as well as to socialise with their peer group. Social, Emotional and Mental Health concerns

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[6] Locke, A., Ginsborg, J. & Peers, I. (2002) *Development and Disadvantage: implications for early years IJLCD* Vol 37:1
Clegg, J., Hollis, C., Rutter, M. (2005). Developmental language disorders – a follow up in later adult life. Cognitive, language and psychosocial outcomes. *Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry*, 46, 2, 128-149

[7]

have increased markedly during this time[8] but any focus on wellbeing or mental health support needs to be inclusive and address the barriers to access to 'talking therapies' which SLCN presents.

The Education Endowment Fund's Teaching and learning Toolkit[9] refers specifically to Oral Language interventions and the impact they have on children's learning. On average children make 5 months additional progress over a year. Children and young people who struggle with speech, language and communication may need additional targeted small group support to catch up with their peers.

Recommendation

Schools should ensure that any recovery curriculum includes a strong focus on oral language skills and supports children who struggle with speech, language and communication.

Those children who require a more targeted approach to addressing their speech, language and communication needs should have access to targeted interventions[10] with a robust evidence base to support this group of children to catch up with their peers.

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[8] https://youngminds.org.uk/media/3708/coronavirus-report_march2020.pdf
[9]
https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit/oral-language-interventions/
[10] Lee and Pring Child Language Teaching and Therapy 2015: Talk Boost Evaluation
https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0265659015590426