Oracy APPG

Written evidence

Members of the Oracy APPG will consider written, verbal and audio-visual evidence and oversee oral evidence sessions. All evidence will inform the final report.

The extended deadline for submitting written evidence is **20th September 2019**. We would appreciate if the submissions would follow the following guidelines:

- Be in a Word format
- No longer than 3000 words
- State clearly who the submission is from, and whether it is sent in a personal capacity or on behalf of an organisation
- Begin with a short summary in bullet point form
- Have numbered paragraphs
- Where appropriate, provide references

Please write your evidence below and email the completed form via email to inquiry@oracyappg.org.uk with the subject line of 'Oracy APPG inquiry'

Marie Gascoigne

Full name:

Better Communication CIC

School or Organisation:

Founder and Director

Role:

Written evidence:

1. Context for this evidence

   1.1. Better Communication CIC is a not for profit social enterprise established in 2011 in response to the ongoing demand for support from Local Authorities, health bodies including Clinical Commissioning Groups, NHS Trusts and other provider organisations, as well as schools with their increasing autonomy to commission provision to support speech, language and communication needs. www.bettercommunication.org.uk

   1.2. The work of Better Communication CIC draws on the Balanced System® Framework. The Balanced System® is the framework developed by Marie Gascoigne to facilitate a change in thinking in children's services towards outcomes and impact and away from the focus on inputs. This approach was developed in the speech, language and communication needs arena but is increasingly being used more broadly as a framework for change and impact measurement. https://bit.ly/BalancedSystemOverview

   1.3. The Balanced System® Scheme for Schools and Settings is a specific change programme for schools and settings which can lead to a joint accreditation with NAPLIC and Afasic, both charities within the SLCN sector. Since 2014, over 200 schools and settings have taken part in the scheme. Most recently the Scheme for Schools and Settings has been offered to over 100 schools, settings and childminders in Derby as part of the Derby Opportunity Area. https://www.thebalancedsystem.org/schools/

   1.4. This evidence has been provided by Marie Gascoigne both as the originator of the Balanced System and the Director of Better Communication CIC.

2. Value and impact summary of key points:
   2.1. Oracy is a core life skill which adds value to a child or young persons' potential and life chances. We know this because the ability to communicate orally is valued in the work place over and above other technical skills, that young people with good communication skills are more likely to be selected for employment, and that strong communication skills impact positively on self-esteem, mental health and well-being. These are well documented including in Gascoigne & Gross, 2017 (https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/media/540327/tct_talkingaboutageneration_report_online.pdf)

   2.2. In Talking about a Generation, we also summarise the impact on life chances of not providing the necessary support for the development of good oracy skills at different key developmental points.

   2.3. The links between strong oracy skills and literacy development are also well documented and will not be repeated here.

3. Provision and access summary of key points:
   3.1. Any high quality provision requires clearly identified outcomes regardless of the area of focus. This may seem obvious but our in experience, a strategic commitment to enabling the whole system, whether in a school, setting or Local Authority area to establish processes that will meet clearly stated shared outcomes is key to ensuring that children and young people maximise their potential.

   3.2. Better Communicaton CIC has developed change methodology to support schools and settings in delivering an outcomes based whole systems approach to speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). This of course encompasses good oracy provision as part of the wider SLC provision including the differentiated provision for those with SLCN.

3.3. We suggest that if the high-level outcomes for speech, language and communication within the Balanced System® Framework are being met in a given situation then outcomes for oracy for all children will *de facto* also be being met.

3.4. The Balanced System® Framework sets out outcomes across Five Strands of Family and Young Person Support; Environment; Workforce; Identification and Intervention and the Three Levels of Universal, Targeted and Specialist and the processes which any system whether local authority, school or settings can follow to meet these outcomes.

3.5. Communication skills, including oracy, need to be at the centre of strategic planning as well as practitioner planning and delivery. If SLCN is substituted with the term 'oracy' in the high level outcomes framework below, we have a potential outcome framework for oracy.

The Five Strands are all equally important:

3.5.1. supporting families to nurture communication and oral traditions at home;

3.5.2. ensuring that environments are conducive to interaction and communication;

3.5.3. developing the whole workforce in terms of understanding and ability to facilitate communication as well as having some with more specialist skills;

3.5.4. identifying those who struggle with communication and oracy early and providing support;

3.5.5. interventions that range from strategies for all through to specific support for those that need it most.

THE BALANCED SYSTEM® HIGH LEVEL OUTCOMES FOR SPEECH, LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION NEEDS

THE BALANCED SYSTEM®

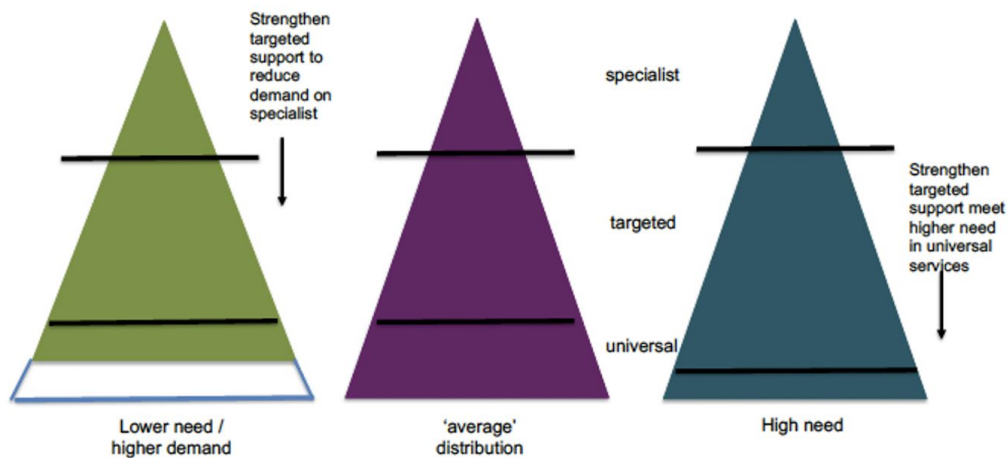| FAMILY SUPPORT	ENVIRONMENT	WORKFORCE	IDENTIFICATION	INTERVENTION
FS3. Specialist - Parents and carers of children with specialist SLCN receive specific specialist support to ensure confidence in their role as a key communication partner for their child and to increase their understanding of the specific communication challenges associated with their child's needs. Young people with SLCN are enabled to be active participants decisions about their support.	EE3. Specialist - Places where children and young people with specialist and complex SLCN spend their time for learning and leisure are communication friendly. The necessary adaptations are in place to maximise access in addition to the enhancements expected at a universal and targeted levels.	WW3. Specialist - Knowledge skills and expertise are developed in identified members of the wider workforce in order to ensure that, working with specialist support, there are staff that are confident and competent to support the delivery of specialist interventions including individual and small group work, support parents, adapt the environment and identify children who need specialist support.	ID3. Specialist - Children with specialist SLCN have their needs identified effectively and quickly. This includes multidisciplinary assessment where appropriate.	IN3. Specialist - Children and young people needing specialist intervention for their SLCN receive appropriate and timely provision in the most functionally appropriate context for their needs. Progress measures will include activity, participation and well-being goals in addition to goals relating to their core SLC impairment.
FS2. Targeted - Parents and carers of children with identified speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) access additional specific support to ensure confidence in their role as a key communication partner and educational support for their child. Families and young people with SLCN are supported to make choices and access services.	EE2. Targeted - Places where children and young people with identified SLCN spend their time for learning and leisure are communication friendly. Appropriate additional enhancements are made that enable children and young people with identified SLCN to more easily understand and to express themselves.	WW2. Targeted - The wider workforce is supported to develop specific knowledge and skills to support children and young people with identified SLCN. Setting and school staff are confident and competent to deliver targeted interventions, support parents, adapt the environment and identify children who need additional support.	ID2. Targeted - Efficient and accessible processes are in place that support the identification of more specific SLCN. The wider workforce, setting and school staff are supported to be confident and competent to identify children and young people who may require targeted support and/or referral to specialist services for their SLCN.	IN2. Targeted - Children and young people benefiting from targeted interventions will have access to evidence based targeted interventions to develop core speech, language and communication skills delivered in the most appropriate functional context. These might include 1:1 and / or small group interventions that are typically designed by specialist practitioners and delivered by those with appropriate training.
FS1. Universal - All parents and carers are supported with information and resources to encourage their role as effective primary communicative partners for their children. Families and young people are able to make proactive choices with respect to their child's or own needs.	EE1. Universal - Places where children and young people spend their time for learning and leisure are communication friendly. Environments have appropriate enhancements that make it easier for all children and young people to understand and express themselves.	WW1. Universal - The wider workforce is supported to have a good basic understanding of speech, language and communication including supportive strategies. Setting and school staff are confident in their role as facilitators of communication. The wider workforce has access to appropriate training around speech, language and communication.	ID1. Universal - Early identification of children and young people whose speech, language and communication needs may require targeted or specialist support is as efficient and accessible as possible. Preidentification information and advice is available in a given area, school or setting.	IN1. Universal - Homes, settings and schools are supported to develop the language and communication skills of all children and young people through language enrichment and supportive activities.

3.6. The framework encourages collection of evidence of *impact* – not inputs or outputs. This fundamental move in thinking and planning, whether at LA level or at a curricular level or even in a specific classroom lesson plan challenges a change in thinking for many from 'what did I do?' to 'how can I prove it made a difference?'

3.7. Our evidence from approaching 200 schools and settings that have undertaken or are underway with this systematic methodology is that by undertaking the accreditation programme and exploring systematically the offer in the school or settings, and then identifying the areas for change and, most importantly, the relative contributions required from all elements of the school system, Governors, Head and senior leaders, class teachers and teaching assistants, the profile of communication is raised (there is a requirement to develop a school wide communication strategy).

3.8. The focus on evidence of impact, the 'prove it' challenge, has been found to have process benefits within the system by both evidencing the central nature of communication to all teaching and learning but also giving status to collecting evidence that this is the case.

3.9. We are happy to sign-post to schools that have successfully adopted this whole school approach and achieved accreditation or information can be found at https://www.thebalancedsystem.org/accredited-schools. Detailed impact reports can be shared with the consent of individual schools if the enquiry would find this helpful. There is also an impact report at local authority level that may be possible to share if requested.

3.10. The key point to note is that by focusing on the outcomes that need to be achieved, the schools and settings are free to navigate the how in the most appropriate way for their individual circumstances with the coaching support from their mentor as needed.

4. Barriers summary of key points

4.1. Learning from other strategies within the speech, language and communication sector over the past twenty years does indicate that for nationwide change to embed there has to be both an incentive to positively address the issues and a concern that there will be negative consequences for not doing so, typically through the inspection processes. A clear example of success in this respect is the specific mention of speech, language and communication provision in the joint SEND inspections at LA level which have resulted in significant attention to these issues at LA and CCG level.

4.2. With that in mind, clearly having oracy and language and communication explicitly identified as an area of focus is helpful.

4.3. The incentive has to be the positive impact on all areas of learning for children and young people with good oracy and communication skills.

4.4. One of the main barriers to achieving consistent outcomes across regions, local authorities and schools within LAs is the potential for a 'one size fits all' approach to planning that is focused on equal inputs without taking account of the differences in need. The prediction of SLCN tool within the Balanced System® Framework identifies the predicted need in a given area, be it local authority, ward, or school. This then provides a rationale for identifying that in a given area or group of schools more resource and effort will be needed to achieve the same outcomes as in another area. If we consider this across the Five Strands, it will be the case that Family Support activities around oracy may need to be enhanced where the context suggests that disadvantage will impact on outcomes in this area.

4.5. In areas or schools or settings where there is a greater challenge to developing communication and oracy skills the provision needs to be tailored to allow equity of outcome which by definition requires different (unequal) inputs. So in areas where there are high predictions of under attainment for language and communication domains, more targeted inputs are required but across the Five Strands – not just in intervention or identification.

ADJUSTING PROVISION TO ACHIEVE EQUITY OF OUTCOME

ADJUSTING MODEL TO MEET NEED

Strengthen targeted support to reduce demand on specialist

Lower need / higher demand

specialist

targeted

universal

'average' distribution

Strengthen targeted support meet higher need in universal services

High need

Footer

4.6. At a local authority or school level this might require greater commissioning of support such as that provided by speech and language therapists to support the targeted and universal offer with resources and training as well as establishing a strong tier of targeted interventions delivered with colleagues from within schools and settings. This expertise and the provision resulting from it directly contributes to oracy development within the schools and settings that are involved.

4.7. Dealing with barriers requires different thinking. The destination or goal is maximising the communication and oracy potential of children and young people but the route to achieving this will be appropriately different in different contexts and at different ages and stages.

4.8. The COVID-19 pandemic has emphasised both the importance of communication skills and the challenges of supporting and developing these skills without the access to familiar methods.

4.9. Our recent work on redefining the model for achieving the same outcomes in the context of periods of home schooling, bubbles and social distancing shows a shift towards needing to increase support for families, unpacking school based interventions and seeking ways of achieving the outcomes in remote ways, re-imagining the ways of having impact.

4.10. Most importantly, in areas that have embraced a whole system approach pre-COVID, our experience thus far is that the adjustment has been easier and more effective than for areas where this is not the case.

5. Summary remarks
   5.1. There is learning from the journey of the SLCN sector over the past twenty years in terms of awareness raising, campaigning, researching and evidencing. This enquiry has the potential to place oracy at the centre of education and learning and link this core life skill to both improved life chances and social mobility for the individual but also economic and social benefit for a generation of young people.
   5.2. Our specific experience in using a very systematic outcomes focused improvement methodology with the clear outcomes framework forming the centre of the model indicates that, whilst it is a challenging process, the change in thinking in terms of how planning happens is powerful and lasts beyond the moment.
   5.3. Focus on evidence of impact is crucial to long term change. Asking schools to do something without a means of capturing the evidence of change is not helpful. However, where that impact evidence does become central, the benefits for individuals, groups, classes and whole schools is tangible.
   5.4. I should be happy to discuss further if helpful.

Marie Gascoigne
Better Communication CIC
June 2020