Oracy APPG Inquiry – September 2019
Evidence from I CAN, the children's communication charity

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 of the strong evidence to show the role of language in literacy development, in learning, social and emotional development and in emotional regulation.

In this evidence we make the following points:

Value and impact

- **Spoken language is closely linked with learning, memory and knowledge acquisition. There is a clear, evidenced rationale for this which needs to be communicated more widely.**
- **For pupils with SLCN, an oracy curriculum provides the essential foundation on which can be built more targeted and specialist intervention.**
- **As spoken language is critical to children and young people's development, rather than a separate strategy it should be integrated into existing policy, guidance and processes.**

Provision and access

- **Strong evidence of the importance supporting speech, language and communication skills in order to close the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers could be used by the DfE in guidance for schools, and in inspector training to drive change.**
- **High quality teaching can be characterised by classrooms which have a focus on encouraging children to talk, and where adults are skilled in facilitating language development. These are inclusive classrooms.**
- **An accountability framework where talk is valued, and shared evidence of impact will help to drive oracy in schools.**

Barriers

- **We suggest solutions to the longstanding barriers:**
    a. **A clear definition of Oracy.**
    b. **A requirement to track progress in spoken language.**
    c. **An increase in focus on language in the curriculum, judged by trained Ofsted inspectors.**
    d. **Training for school staff in how to facilitate Oracy approaches, and how to spot pupils who struggle with spoken language.**

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Value and impact

1. **Why spoken language is not valued – long-held beliefs**

    1.1. The [Bercow: Ten Years On Review](#), led by I CAN and the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) looked at support for children and young people's speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). One of the key themes arising from this review was the lack of awareness of the importance of communication and language.

    There is a long-held belief that children develop the language skills they need in the early years period, and that this is sorted by the time they reach school. The early years is definitely an important time, but language skills continue to develop right through school and into adulthood.

    In the early years, early language is seen as contributing to early literacy development. This is typified by the early learning goal 'Communication, language and literacy'. In the school curriculum, while there is recognition of the importance of spoken language, there is a very minimal programme of study which isn't age-differentiated; a single, brief programme of study covers the whole of the primary age range and this is even briefer at secondary.

    1.2. This reflects the value placed on the _development_ of language skills. There is a further long held belief that children 'just develop' language and communication skills, that they don't need to be taught. All children and young people need adults around them who understand how to support the development of the language skills needed for oracy education. Currently there is no space within the curriculum for this.

2. **The impact if children do not receive an oracy curriculum**

    2.1. An oracy curriculum provides children with the opportunity to both:
    - Develop their spoken language skills.
    - Use talk to enhance their learning.

    Our evidence focuses mainly on the first of these two points.

    2.2. There is now strong evidence which shows the importance of good spoken language skills. Children with better spoken language skills do better in school. Without these skills, the impacts are wide ranging – on pupils' educational attainment, on their social, emotional and mental health and on their life chances.

    ### *2.2.1. Educational attainment*
    - Just 27% of young children with language difficulties made expected academic progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage compared with 72% of all children.[1]
    - With language difficulties, children are nearly four times less likely to achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of their primary school years. (18% of pupils with identified SLCN compared with 64% of all pupils).[2]
    - Only 9.5% of pupils language difficulties gained 9-5 grade in English and maths at GCSE, compared with 42.9% of all pupils;[3] over four times less likely to do well in GCSEs.

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[1] DfE EYFS results 2018. (SLCN as primary need)
[2] DfE KS2 SATS results 2018
[3] DfE GCSE results 2018

2.2.2. Social, emotional and mental health

- 81% of children with emotional and behavioural disorders have unidentified language difficulties.[4]
- Young people referred to mental health services are three times more likely to have language difficulties than those who have not been referred.[5]

2.2.3. Life chances

- Children with poor vocabulary skills are twice as likely to be unemployed when they reach adulthood.[6]
- 60% of young offenders have low language skills.[7]

Year on year, employers rate communication as one of the top skills they look for in new recruits. In 2017, I CAN carried out a survey of 53 employers, asking them which communication skills were most valuable to them. The top five skills identified are all those which would be developed through an oracy curriculum:

- Checking when unsure or confused
- Working as a team
- Good listening
- Friendly and approachable
- Being able to adjust your style of talking

3. The importance of oracy education for pupils with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN)

3.1. Many children and young people have difficulty using and understanding spoken language – 10% of all pupils have long-term speech, language and communication needs (SLCN)[8]. In some areas of disadvantage upwards of 50% of children have SLCN[9] [10]. For these pupils an oracy education is equally important. There is now a clear, evidenced rationale supporting provision for children and young people with SLCN which is organised in three tiers. Classrooms where talk is structured and encouraged through an oracy curriculum provide the 'communication supportive environment' that children with SLCN need. This provides the foundation which underpins targeted support for pupils with poor language, and specialist support for those with long-term SLCN.

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[4] Hollo A, Wehby J.H, Oliver R.M. (2014) Unidentified Language Deficits in Children with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders: A Meta-Analysis. Exceptional Children 80(2): 169-186

[5] Cohen, N. Farnia, F. And Im-Bolter, N. *Higher order language competence and adolescent mental health* Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry 54:7 (2013), pp 733–744

[6] Law, J., Rush, R., Schoon, I.. and Parsons, S. (2009) *Modeling Developmental Language Difficulties From School Entry Into Adulthood: Literacy, Mental Health, and Employment Outcomes*. Journal of Speech, language and hearing research, 52 (6)

[7] Bryan, K and Mackenzie, J (2008) Meeting the Speech Language and Communication Needs of Vulnerable Young People

[8] 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

[9] Locke, A., Ginsborg, J. & Peers, I. (2002) *Development and Disadvantage: implications for early years IJLCD* Vol 37:1

[10] The Communication Trust (2012) Evaluation of Talk of the Town

This foundation tier, an oracy curriculum, as part of a coordinated approach has been shown to be effective in both primary[11] and secondary[12] schools – improving outcomes for pupils with SLCN.

4. Children and young people recognise the value of spoken language

The Communication Trust[13] consulted with over 70 children and young people about their views on communication. We also consulted with children and young people as part of The [Bercow: Ten Years On Review](#) . They had lots to say!

4.1. Some young people hadn't really thought much about communication skills before, though clearly showed how important they felt these skills are:

"Good communication is one of the most important skills anyone could have."

"We need communication skills to get jobs, interviews, for later life."

4.2. They gave many different reasons why communication should be supported; many felt these skills could be taught in school, but recognised the challenges.

"If not at school, then where would people learn these skills?"

"Teachers are just too busy with paperwork and teaching the curriculum to think about teaching communication skills as well."

"It should be part of everything we do, but it will mean a big change in thinking. Teachers are really focused on their subject and teaching."

4.3. Young people were able to identify what worked for them to encourage and support communication skills, as well as what didn't work.

"Give pupils a chance to answer or comment. Wait – maybe even 5 minutes, don't interrupt until we're ready, nod and give eye contact"

"Teach us how to debate and have discussions in every lesson – let us practise the skills, you get better if you practise"

"Sometimes adults can be all speaking at the same time it's so difficult to hear".

5. Value and impact: Solutions - what is needed

5.1. Pupils will benefit from an oracy education if these skills are valued. It is encouraging to see that the education inspection framework is research-informed, allowing the possibility to show clearly the impact of oracy approaches on achievement, and of language on reading

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[11] I CAN (2013) A Chance to Talk A national pilot programme - a scalable model for improving children's communication skills at primary school
http://licensing.ican.org.uk/sites/licensing.ican.org.uk/files/A_Chance_to_Talk.pdf

[12] Hartshorne, M. and Black, R (2015) I CAN *Secondary Talk* An evaluation over three years

[13] The Communication Trust (2009) Children and Young People's Views: what do children and young people think about speech, language and communication

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comprehension. If this is more clearly communicated, it could provide the impetus for a greater focus in schools.

We have developed a clear, evidenced rationale outlining the role language plays in learning, memory and acquiring knowledge, linked closely to the theoretical perspective taken in developing the revised draft inspection framework. (see appendix 1 on page 8).

5.2. Spoken language is important beyond the early years so the focus of this inquiry in school aged pupils is welcomed and needs to be reflected at a strategic level. Policy for very young children has developed considerably to have a focus on spoken language: early language is embedded within the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum, within social mobility policy, and within recent literacy initiatives; the same needs to happen for school-aged children.

5.3. Spoken language is important for literacy and learning, but also for mental health and well-being, for social mobility, for employment. We don't need a separate strategy for children and young people's spoken language, we need to see it <u>integrated into existing policy</u>, guidance and processes.

Provision and access

1. High quality oracy education

There is a strong evidence base for the impact of oracy education. A number of randomised control trials and quasi-experimental studies show that a pedagogy which encourages active participation through structuring talking, discussion and interaction, and which encourages learners to reflect, self-evaluate and extend their learning, improves:

- Attainment scores in English, mathematics and science[14] [15]
- Retention of subject-specific knowledge[16]
- Cognitive Ability Test (CAT) scores[17]
- Reasoning[18]

The same approach will also provide the structure and adult interaction so that children's language skills develop. We have pulled together the features of 'communication supportive classrooms' in Appendix 2 on page 9 . These environments facilitate language development and also support

[14] For example Gorard, S., Siddiqui, N. and Huat See, B. (2015) Philosophy for Children: Evaluation Report and Executive Summary, London: Education Endowment Foundation (3).

[15] Further evidence in Millard and Menzies (2017) The State of Speaking in our schools LKMCo

[16] Adey, P. and Shayer, M. (2015) 'The Effects of Cognitive Acceleration', in L. B. Resnick, C. S. C. Asterhan and S. N. Clarke (eds.) Socializing Intelligence Through Academic Talk and Dialogue, Washington D.C.: American Educational Research Association, 127-140 (130, 137-138).

[17] Topping, K. J. and Trickey, S. (2015) 'The Role of Dialogue in Philosophy for Children', in L. B. Resnick, C. S. C. Asterhan and S. N. Clarke (eds.) Socializing Intelligence Through Academic Talk and Dialogue, Washington D.C.: American Educational Research Association, 99-110 (104-105)

[18] Mercer, N., Wegerif, R. and Dawes, L. (1999) 'Children's talk and the development of reasoning in the classroom', British Educational Research Journal, 25, 95-111

children so they are able to engage in increasingly complex verbal reasoning tasks that both deepen their understanding and illustrate their thinking to teachers: an oracy education.

2. **Access for all – the right expertise to support oracy education**
    2.1. The features of a 'communication supportive classroom' are especially important where there are large numbers of children with language skills (including poor vocabulary) behind those expected for their age. Adults have a key role in scaffolding interaction – the to and fro of speaking and listening through pausing, recasting, expanding, prompting, modelling. This helps pupils to make progress in their spoken language, narrowing the gap between them and their peers. It also ensures all pupils with SLCN can access oracy education to enhance their learning.

    2.2. Classrooms where adults scaffold oracy skills are inclusive classrooms. When schools were putting together their own local offer as part of the SEND reforms, I CAN drew up a description of high quality teaching which had a focus on communication – this can be found in Appendix 3 on page 10. In this, the skills of school staff are paramount.

    2.3. As part of the [Bercow: Ten Years On Review](#) we consulted widely to pull out the key features of impactful practice in supporting pupils' communication and language, and those with SLCN:
    - A lead in school for spoken language
    - Speech and language therapist as part of the school team
    - Spoken language embedded in school policies
    - A three tiered model of support for pupils with SLCN
    - Pupils advising on what support they feel makes a difference
    - Spoken language is seen as part of quality first teaching
    - A rolling programme of workforce development
    - Knowing the impact of any interventions to support spoken language
    - All staff confident in supporting spoken language, able to identify those who are struggling
    - System in place to track spoken language

In this short video clip https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kznvSGqkalo , the Headteacher of a primary school talks about training for staff in ways to support children's language – through I CAN's Primary Talk. Originally aimed at pupils with SLCN, she saw that the strategies introduced through training improved the standard of teaching leading to better outcomes for pupils.

Each year, the Communication Trust run No Pens Day Wednesday, when pupils are encouraged to put down their pens and learn by talking. This case study from a secondary school shows the benefit of talk-based approaches on pupils' written language:
https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/media/308944/archbishop_temple_school.pdf

> *"We also saw an improvement in their written work following the initiative. We found that students were able to write down more, having had time to talk about and process the topics they were learning before putting pen to paper."*

3. **Solutions: Provision and access - what is needed:**

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5.4. With over three quarters of school leaders accessing the Education Endowment Foundation teaching and learning toolkit, it is important to share the evidence that a focus on oral language can boost students' progress by an additional five months – six months for pupils from disadvantaged background. This evidence could be used by the DfE in guidance for schools, and in inspector training to drive change – a lever to incentivise schools.

3.1. Clear messages from the top are needed to approve noisy classrooms! Talking in lessons is good for knowledge gain. It has been good to see increased emphasis on vocabulary and language in the new Ofsted education inspection framework – examples of what this looks like in practice will be useful both for inspectors and for schools.

3.2. The English Hub network, and Training Centre are a real opportunity for primary schools to see how language and literacy are linked. Schools are required to narrow the word gap, as well as improve levels of literacy. It will be important that in reporting outcomes of the network, that oracy has as much air space as literacy.

Barriers

I CAN has long campaigned for spoken language to be recognised as a foundation life skill, right across the age range. We have frequently reflected on the barriers to this happening, as well as solutions:

1. *The way we describe spoken language*

There are many ways of describing pupils' language, and many of them have been used in this evidence: oracy, articulacy, spoken language, early language, speaking and listening, communication. **Solution**:

It would help enormously to have a clear definition of spoken language and/or oracy. The most important thing in relation to children's learning is a shared understanding that spoken language is about *understanding* as well as speaking.

2. *No system for tracking spoken language*

Currently, beyond the age of five, there is no statutory requirement to teach, monitor and report on pupils' language development. This needs to change. Language needs to be seen to be valued.

Solutions:

- Alongside pupils' reading, there should be a requirement to report on levels of spoken language, and to identify those who need support.
- The mandatory speaking and listening qualification should count towards GCSE English.

3. *A lack of prominence in the curriculum*

Language needs a more prominent place in the curriculum – more than the 12 broad statements which currently define 'spoken language' in the primary curriculum and five in the secondary curriculum.

Solution:

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Spoken language is there in the curriculum. While schools are developing their curriculum in response to the new education inspection framework, there is an opportunity to build in spoken language in a more structured way. I CAN has a framework, tools and resources to support schools in doing this [link].

Training, resources and information for school inspectors will ensure that they are looking for progression in spoken language in the same way that they look for progression in other curriculum areas.

4. *School staff lack confidence in supporting spoken language*

School staff are underconfident in their ability to support and monitor pupils' language, potentially as a result of the curriculum changes which saw speaking and listening come out of the curriculum as a detailed programme of study (The Communication Trust workforce survey 2017). There are a range of training opportunities available, and tools which are available to support school staff, summarised on https://www.bercow10yearson.com/schools-and-colleges/ but despite this, there is a need for more well validated tools to track language across age and phase.

<u>Solution</u>

The early career framework currently being developed and piloted by DfE for newly qualified teachers is an ideal opportunity to ensure that there is time for this training to take place.

Word count without appendices: 3105

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Appendix 1: Language, memory and knowledge

Given the important role that spoken language plays in many of the theoretical approaches to learning described in acquiring new knowledge, we are keen to ensure appropriate recognition of spoken language in the framework.

Good levels of spoken language are crucial for:

- Describing and explaining to make connections (elaboration theory). Barnes (2010) described how exploratory talk allows pupils to explore new ideas or information or judgments in relation to existing knowledge, contributing to a quality of learning that goes beyond rote[19][1]. Alexander (2001)[20][2], in his comparison of teaching approaches internationally, identified that opportunities for students to engage with, discuss and analyse led to better intellectual engagement and learning.
- Closely linking verbal and visual information to aid retrieval (dual coding). A recent EEF guidance report (2019)[21][3] illustrates how visual support is only effective if used together with skilful questioning; it is the association and links between spoken language and verbal information that facilitates learning.
- Processing information in working memory while creating new schema (cognitive load theory). There is much written about the role of working memory in language processing, but the relationship is reciprocal. Good language skills are needed in order for working memory to function efficiently: Firstly, children need good language skills in order to use the 'sub-vocal rehearsal' (repeating things in our head) involved in retaining information while processing it (Baddeley 2003)[22]. Secondly, children with good language skills can retain new or unfamiliar information for longer periods of time while they process it (Archibald 2017)[23] before transferring to long-term memory.

Accessible summary

Language plays an important role in learning, memory and in acquiring knowledge.

Good levels of spoken language are crucial for pupils to discuss, analyse and explore new ideas to make connection to existing knowledge (elaboration theory). Good language skills are also needed in efficient working memory, before information can be stored in long-term memory (cognitive load theory): we use 'inner language' to repeat new information in our head while processing. As well as this, if new information includes familiar words, sounds and phrases then this processing is much easier – therefore pupils with stronger language, can remember, retain and learn more efficiently.

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[19][1] Barnes D. (2010) Why Talk is important English Teaching: Practice and Critique 6 (2)
[20][2] Alexander, R. J. (2001). Culture and pedagogy: International comparisons in primary education. Oxford, England: Blackwell
[21][3] EEF (2019) Using digital technology to improve learning
[22] Baddeley, A. (2003) Working Memory and Language: an overview
[23] Journal of Communication Disorders 36 (3)
 Archibald, L. (2017) Working Memory and Language: A Review Child Language Teaching and Therapy 33 (1)

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Appendix 2 - *What does a classroom which supports children's communication look like?*

Classrooms which support children's communication may include some of the following features:

- Seating arranged to minimize distractions

- Displays which remind children of what will help their learning and communication, such as

    o   A sequence of pictures or symbols showing the timetable

    o   Key words linked to current topics – maybe with a symbol or picture

    o   Prompts for children showing them what they can do if they need help – to support independent learning

    o   Reminders about different styles of talking: the style for story-telling or reporting a science investigation

- Staff who know that for these displays to be effective, they must point them out and change them regularly – otherwise they just become 'part of the wallpaper'.

- Staff who can skillfully monitor their own language and adjust it for different children e.g. simplifying instructions for some children, exploring alternative vocabulary or encouraging longer sentences for more able pupils. They use excellent questioning skills to check understanding and promote thinking skills.

- Adults with a key role of providing a 'good language' model in the classroom - they show good communication or thinking through their own talking, scaffold sentence constructions to support all children, while giving children time to think about their answers.

- Staff praise children for good language and communication skills. Praise is also specific to the speaking and listening learning objectives, which are shared with the children in ways they understand.

- There are well-established routines and ways of allowing children to think about what they want to say. Children might have a "talking partner" and are always given specific tasks or things to talk about for a short time in lessons. Talking in groups is carefully managed and structured to support learning.

- Links are made between good communication and successful learning or interaction – and said out loud to make it clear to children.

- Children are encouraged to ask questions and praised when they do, so they have the skills and confidence to say when they don't understand and can learn ways of seeking clarification.

- Information about the children's learning is shared with parents / carers, including ways that they can support their child's language development. There may be "talk" homework tasks instead of some written work. Children rehearse what they might say to tell their parents about their school day.

Appendix 3 – High quality teaching when all pupils are included so they can do well at school.

This means:

- Pupils know and understand what is expected in the lesson – what they are going to learn but also how they should behave. So the rules for talking and working are made clear
- Staff are confident in supporting all children's learning and communication and in identifying those who have difficulties
- During the lesson, staff will point out what's going well e.g. "when Sammy was talking it was good that you looked at her to show you were listening". Praise can really motivate pupils if it is used well.
- Staff tell pupils what next steps would be, for example "that was interesting information... it would be even better if you also told us how you worked that out"
- Staff will carefully explain new words and ideas, and check pupils have understood. They use charts, pictures, gestures – anything that helps pupils really understand.
- Teachers get the balance right between how much they talk, and how much pupils talk, and set up the lesson so that pupils talk to each other or in groups. This means pupils have time to think and are not pressurised by too much information.
- Teachers will also ask questions which help pupils to think, and demonstrate what helps, or suggest ways of learning or talking e.g. "I usually need time to think, and talk things through in my head" or "what you could say is 'can you say that again please?'".
- Pupils are encouraged to ask questions when they don't understand – the classroom is 'asking friendly'
- At the end of the lesson, pupils will know how they have done, and how they can make this better.

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