Early language: Facts and Stats

• **By 22 months** – a child’s language development can predict outcomes at age 26\(^1\).
• **By 2 years** – 75% of a child’s brain growth has occurred\(^2\).
• **By ages 3-6 years** - a child’s narrative skills are a powerful predictor of literacy skill at 8-12 years.\(^3\)
• **By 4 years** – the difference in the number of words children from disadvantaged backgrounds hear is 19 million\(^4\).
• **By 5 years** – a child’s vocabulary will predict their educational success and outcomes at age 30\(^5\).

Key messages: Language and literacy development

• **Literacy depends on language:**
  o Speaking and listening, together with reading and writing are prime communication skills that are central to children’s intellectual, social and emotional development.
  o There is no dispute about the impact of poor language skills on reading performance - children need to have good oral language skills as a foundation for literacy.
  o A landmark longitudinal study, found that by age 8 children whose language difficulties had been resolved by 5½ had developed good reading and spelling skills compared to children whose language difficulties were not resolved.\(^6\)
  o Oral language development during Foundation stage predicts educational achievement through to school leaving age.\(^7\)

• **Literacy supports learning:**

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\(^5\) Leon Feinstein and Kathryn Duckworth (2006) *Development in the early years: its importance for school performance and adult outcomes*
\(^6\) Bishop DVM and Adams (1990) *A Prospective Study of the relationship between specific language impairment, phonological disorders and reading retardation* Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry 31
\(^7\) Snowling M, Hulme C, Bailey A, Stothrad S and Lindsay G (2011 ) Better communication research programme: Language and Literacy Attainment of Pupils during Early Years and through KS2: Does teacher assessment at five provide a valid measure of children’s current and future educational attainments DfE RR 172a
Pupils need vocabulary, good communication skills and the ability to organise their thoughts and ideas to cope with the demands of all subjects. Reading depends on more than decoding words and phonics. Children need to have a good vocabulary to understand what they are reading and read for meaning.

Supporting children's oral language and developing their vocabulary helps develop their overall competence in literacy.

- **Literacy and Language underpins life chances:**
  - Children who have communication difficulties beyond the Foundation Stage will go on to have subsequent literacy difficulties affecting educational achievement, life chances and mental health.
  - 50-90% of children with persistent communication difficulties go on to have reading difficulties.
  - Children who have reading difficulties often have an undiagnosed underlying difficulty learning and using language.

- **Children from disadvantaged backgrounds often have poorer language skills:**
  - Children from disadvantaged backgrounds enter school at a lower starting point than children from other socio economic backgrounds. This puts them at risk of literacy difficulties.
  - In fact, children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds are more than twice as likely to have lower language skills.
  - A child’s communication environment influences language development. The number of books available to the child, the frequency of visits to the library feature as important predictors of the child’s expressive vocabulary at 2 years.

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8 Ofsted (2013a) *Improving literacy in secondary schools: a shared responsibility*
12 Dockrell J, Ricketts J and Lindsay G (2012) *Understanding SLCN – Profiles of need and provision* DfE RR227 BCRP4
13 Roulstone et al (2011) *Investigating the role of language in children’s educational outcomes*
A child’s communication environment (books, toys, responsive adults) plays more of a role than social background.\textsuperscript{14}

Where can people go for help?

Information and advice can be found at:

- www.ican.org.uk
- www.ican.org.uk/achancetotalk
- www.ican.org.uk/help
- www.talkingpoint.org.uk
- www.talkboost.org.uk
- www.ican.org.uk/primarytalk

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\textsuperscript{14} Roulstone et al (2011) \textit{Investigating the role of language in children’s educational outcomes}