Speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) and literacy development

What are the links?

Developing strong reading skills depends on children developing good language skills. Spoken language skills play an important role in supporting early literacy development.

Research highlights a clear link between spoken language and speech difficulties resulting in subsequent literacy difficulties.\(^1\)\(^2\) Where children had early speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), those whose language difficulties had been resolved by five and a half had developed good reading and spelling skills – in contrast to the group that had long term and persistent SLCN.\(^3\)

What are the problems?

Almost all children with SLCN have difficulty with some aspect of learning to read and write. As these children are not a homogenous group and literacy development requires many skills, difficulties are varied; they may struggle with decoding print, reading comprehension, spelling or expressive writing.

- **Children with speech sound (phonological) difficulties** often have associated literacy problems. Children with speech sound difficulties can find it hard to link sounds to letters and to segment, blend and manipulate sounds – essential skills for reading.

- **Children with difficulty forming sentences, understanding word meanings or using language socially** may have difficulties in decoding words and in reading comprehension:
  - Knowledge of word meanings, sentence and narrative structure help with decoding.
  - Children who are unable to understand complex spoken language are likely to have poor reading comprehension and those who find it difficult to make inferences will find making sense of extended written text difficult.

- These children may also have **problems understanding or producing written text** because of poor organisation, difficulty forming sentences and limited vocabulary knowledge.

- Research shows that many **children, more than 50% in some areas of deprivation, are starting school with delayed language skills.**\(^4\) There is concern that these children approach learning to read without the language they need in order to support literacy development.

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Research tells us that 50-90% of children with persistent SLCN go on to have reading difficulties,\textsuperscript{5} highlighting the need for the appropriate support to be put in place for these children. Increasingly, there is recognition of the importance of spoken language underpinning written language. A recent Ofsted report\textsuperscript{6} looking at English across primary and secondary schools stated:

- ‘teachers understandably prioritise pupils’ work in reading and writing because they feature more prominently in national tests and examinations.’
- *Speech comes before both reading and writing. The earlier that all children develop confidence in their speech, along with an extensive vocabulary, the more likely it is that they will be able to improve their overall competence in reading and writing.’*

*Speech, Language and Communication needs and Literacy Difficulties* (I CAN 2006) gives more information about the link between literacy and language difficulties, [www.ican.org.uk](http://www.ican.org.uk)

**Where can people go for help?**

Information and advice can be found at:

- [www.ican.org.uk](http://www.ican.org.uk)
- [www.ican.org.uk/achancetotalk](http://www.ican.org.uk/achancetotalk)
- [www.ican.org.uk/help](http://www.ican.org.uk/help)
- [www.talkingpoint.org.uk](http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk)
- [www.talkboost.org.uk](http://www.talkboost.org.uk)
- [www.ican.org.uk/primarytalk](http://www.ican.org.uk/primarytalk)

If used, please credit:  I CAN, the children’s communication charity. [www.ican.org.uk](http://www.ican.org.uk)

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\textsuperscript{6} Ofsted (2012) *Moving English Forwards: Action to Raise Standards in English*