

# make chatter matter



helps children  
communicate

REGISTERED CHARITY 210031



## campaign manifesto

*Make Chatter Matter* is I CAN's campaign to ensure that children's communication skills are at the core of children's policy development.

## Our immediate aims for the *Make Chatter Matter* campaign have a particular focus on the early years.

Over the next year we want public support and government backing for:

- **Informed Parents.**

A commitment to all families that they automatically receive information on communication development.

- **Skilled Staff.**

A commitment that the entire early years children's

workforce will have the necessary skills to support typical communication development, to identify potential problems and to develop strategies to support children with difficulties.

- **Communication Friendly Early Years Settings.**

A commitment to ensuring that all early years settings provide language rich

environments, support skill development and help early identification of difficulties.

- **Specialist Provision.**

A commitment that resources will follow assessed need with a focus on ensuring that those with severe and complex communication disability can easily access the help they and their families need.



[www.ican.org.uk/makechattermatter](http://www.ican.org.uk/makechattermatter)

**I CAN is the children's communication charity.**

***Make Chatter Matter* is I CAN's campaign to ensure that children's communication skills are at the core of children's policy development.**

Communication is the foundation life skill. It affects our ability to learn, form relationships and make friends. Children with speech and language difficulties get left out and left behind.

1 in 10 children have a communication disability.<sup>1</sup> Their lack of speech, language and communication skills prevents them from

participating fully in school life and achieving their potential within the school curriculum. For some their communication disability is severe and complex requiring high levels of specialist support.

Half of all children with a communication disability have another disability. For example, all children with autism have a communication disability as do many with Downs Syndrome and cerebral palsy. This is an important cross disability issue.

In addition, as many as half of all children are entering primary

schools with impoverished speech and language. Evidence is accumulating particularly in disadvantaged areas that upwards of 50% of children are arriving at primary school without the typical communication skills they need to learn.<sup>2</sup>

Communication difficulties are often invisible. Children with a communication disability will often exhibit no outward sign of their disability; no hearing aid, no wheelchair, no Braille. Children who have problems with speech and language often



“ People have a child that becomes a toddler, that toddler a schoolchild and then one day you wake up and that schoolchild is a teenager. You just don't think about having the ability to talk. You just expect babies to pick it up in the end but this is not the case. People cannot afford to be ignorant about their child's communication development and I learnt that the hard way. Parents need to teach their child to talk. ” *Parent*

“ I have noticed a big improvement in R's talking and communication skills. He wants now to talk, when before he was able to get what he needed without much talking. His behaviour has improved greatly and he is much more settled in himself and much easier to reason with. ” *Teacher*

choose to stay silent and thus hide their difficulties.

Children with communication difficulties often get left out and left behind. There is a strong link between communication skills and quality of life. Academic attainment, behaviour, social fulfilment, self esteem and access to employment are all affected by poor communication skills. Early intervention is essential to reduce the flow-on effects of impoverished speech and language.

Communication skills are taken for granted. Communication is one of the most complex and important

skills we ever learn but rarely do we support it or develop it in the same way that we might actively support, for example, learning to walk or eating a meal.

It is widely accepted that communication is fundamental for learning and achievement but there is no primary communication strategy, no government team with overall responsibility for developing the UK's speech and language skills.

Poor communication skills cost the individual, cost families and cost the nation. I CAN is launching its *Make Chatter Matter* campaign with a report on *The Cost to the Nation*

*of Children's Poor Communication.* This report, for the first time, details the true cost of poor communication skills and the impact this has on the future life chances of generations of Britons.

### **What needs to change over the next three years?**

Communication needs to be put at the heart of the children's policy agenda. We want central leadership in each country, driving children's communication skills development across all areas of government policy.

In England we want a dedicated primary communication strategy

“ A child's ability with numbers can be high but language can hold pupils back. Once the language is addressed, the maths ability increased. ” *Teacher*

“ Children are coming into schools with increasingly reduced skills in speaking and listening. ” *Teacher*

“ I was concerned and scared about what the future would hold for my little boy if he couldn't speak. When I CAN first saw him my son was three years old but he had the speech of an 18-month-old baby. When he left he was four and had the speech of a 3½-year-old. Because of I CAN he was able to make up his development by 2½ years in a year. ” *Parent*



to sit alongside the primary literacy, numeracy and ICT strategies. In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland we want a dedicated communication programme.

There needs to be a UK-wide framework that supports children's speech, language and communication skills. This needs to be inclusive for ALL children.

The framework must:

- Drive approaches to create language rich environments in the home, in educational and care settings and in communities.
- Support the early identification of problems and empower parents and the children's workforce to deliver successful strategies to support children with difficulties.

- Ensure resources are available for those children with severe and complex communication disability that require additional specialist help.

I CAN's *Early Talk* programme provides an evidence based, cost-effective framework with proven successful outcomes. Research shows that the I CAN model of intervention in the early years results in significantly greater improvements in language skills and social interaction for children with communication disability than in other settings.<sup>3</sup>

There must be an end to the "postcode lottery" of service provision for children with a communication disability.

The restructuring of health and children's services; a shortage of employed speech and language

therapists; complex statementing processes in England; the binding nature of those statements on education not health services; the failure of many mainstream schools to be truly inclusive; under confident and ill-equipped staff – these factors lead to unequal service provision, pressure on families and poor outcomes for children.

There must be a right of access to every one of the *Every Child Matters* outcomes for all children with communication difficulties in England. In Scotland, there must be an assurance that every child will get access to each of the outcomes of *Getting it Right for Every Child 2006* and the *Curriculum for Excellence 2006*.



**“ It was hard to accept my daughter had speech and language difficulties. She was my first child. I'd had the red book that the health visitor gave me when I first had her but there was no information about communication development. ”** Parent

<sup>1</sup>Law J. (1992). *The Early Identification of Language Impairment in Children*, London, Chapman & Hall

<sup>2</sup>Basic Skills Agency (2002). The Basic Skills Agency reported a significant drop in the speaking and listening skills of British children. In a report in 2002, the Agency found that 66% of primary school head teachers believe that only half of all children entering school have the communication skills they need for an effective start to learning.

<sup>3</sup>Law J., Dockrell, J., Williams K., and Seeff B. (2001). *The I CAN Early Years Evaluation Project*, City University, Institute of Education.

Please contact us if you would like more information on I CAN's *Make Chatter Matter* campaign.

I CAN's report on *The Cost to the Nation of Children's Poor Communication* is also available to download on [www.ican.org.uk/makechattermatter](http://www.ican.org.uk/makechattermatter) or call us to receive a free copy.

I CAN, 4 Dyer's Buildings, Holborn,  
London EC1N 2QP Tel: 020 7674 2725  
E-mail: [makechattermatter@ican.org.uk](mailto:makechattermatter@ican.org.uk)  
[www.ican.org.uk/makechattermatter](http://www.ican.org.uk/makechattermatter)

**Please join us to *Make Chatter Matter*.**

**[www.ican.org.uk/makechattermatter](http://www.ican.org.uk/makechattermatter)**