



helps children  
**communicate**  
REGISTERED CHARITY 210031

## **I CAN *Secondary Talk***

### **An evaluation over three years: a summary**

Summary of the final evaluation report May 2015

Full evaluation report can be found [here](#)

#### **Background**

Speech, language and communication underpin cognitive, emotional and social development – not only in early childhood, but throughout school, adolescence and into adulthood.

Language and communication in secondary schools is often not seen as a priority, and recent curriculum and examination reform reflects this. Given the well evidenced link between good language skills and academic success this is of concern, particularly for the many students with poor language or speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).

I CAN *Secondary Talk* is a whole school programme, which builds staff confidence in supporting language and communication in young people and in identifying those with difficulties. The programme aims to improve pupils' behaviour and raise academic attainment, by focusing on language and communication.

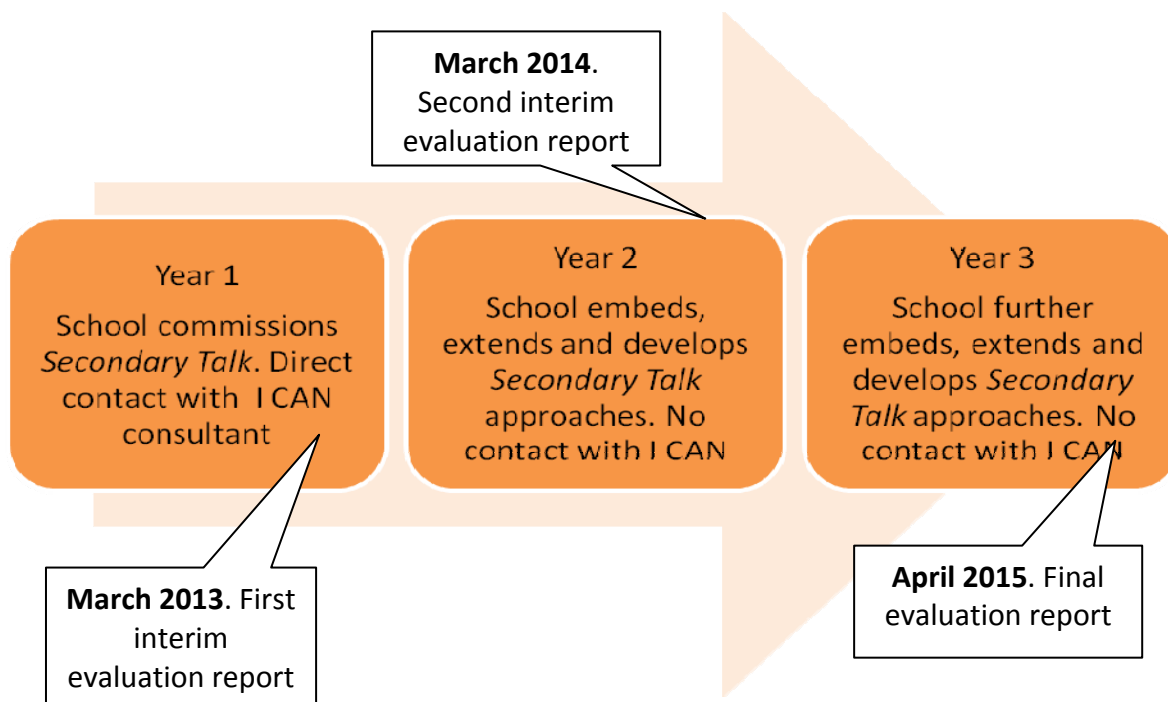
In 2011, *Secondary Talk* was evaluated as having a significant impact on aspects of practice in the classroom. There were also indications from schools that the programme had an impact on students themselves. These changes noted after one year piloting the programme were exciting. And yet the evaluation yielded more questions:

- Are the changes sustained over a longer period of time?
- Does *Secondary Talk* initiate other changes at a whole school level?
- Does *Secondary Talk* impact on the language/communication, attainment and behavioural outcomes of young people?

At a time when changes to the curriculum mean a reduced focus on speaking and listening evidence of impact on learning for pupils is essential to ensure take up by schools. Equally, at a time of reduced spending for schools, demonstrating evidence of sustained impact is also important. This evaluation seeks to provide evidence to support both of these aspects.

## Evaluation approach

The *Secondary Talk* programme runs in each school for one calendar year, when an I CAN advisor supports the school. At the end of the year, I CAN support ends and successful changes to practice are validated. The aim is that changes are sustained and built on in the school over subsequent years.



The current evaluation had three aims:

1. To understand how the programme develops within schools
2. To measure the impact of *Secondary Talk* on pupils' language and communication, attainment, emotional and social skills and engagement with learning
3. To measure the impact on teaching practice, specifically teachers' ability to effectively support young people's communication to improve their learning outcomes, and on whole school policy and practice.

In collaboration with Dr Judy Clegg, University of Sheffield, *Secondary Talk* was evaluated over a three year period starting in April 2012 and ending in April 2015 using a mixed methods, repeated measures approach. Following groups of schools engaged in *Secondary Talk*, data in the form of interviews with senior leaders, lesson observations and pupil focus groups was collected at the end of each academic year from 2012 to 2014. Whole school attainment data from the National Pupil Database (NPD) was collected and analysed with a sub-sample of schools.

Running alongside this there was a small focused comparison study of groups of pupils in two schools: one implementing *Secondary Talk* and one not. A range of standardised tests and non standardised tasks was

carried out with groups of students with varying levels of language over a three year period. Progress was compared across the two schools.

Appendix 1 shows the data collection schedule over the three years of the evaluation, together with main planned activities.

## Results

### 1. Understanding how *Secondary Talk* grows in schools

To find out about the development of *Secondary Talk* in schools, data was collected through interviews with senior leaders in a sample of schools over the three year period. Thematic analysis of these interviews yielded a detailed picture of the growth of the programme. We also investigated the demographics of schools involved:

*Secondary Talk* has continued to grow over the three years. Over the course of the three years, *Secondary Talk* has been rolled out into 52 schools, representing a total of 48,908 pupils and a total of 4487 school staff. Over half of these (52%) are academies. There is a trend for smaller than average schools and higher than average numbers of pupils eligible for Free School Meals and of those identified with SEN.

Seven of the original eleven schools interviewed in 2012 year engaged in repeat interviews over all three years, showing a continued engagement with *Secondary Talk*.

While most schools started in discrete areas of the school – a year group or subject area - the programme has grown to spread into more areas and in the third year became **embedded as ‘custom and practice’ in what schools do on a day to day basis.**

*“..... across the school spoken language and the importance of spoken language is definitely a priority and I think the whole staff would agree with that and I don't think that's where we were three years ago at all so yeah I think the principles are there and I think they are deeply ingrained within the school practice now.”*

Intervention and Literacy co-ordinator, Fazakerley High

Although the schools did not necessarily refer to *Secondary Talk* within their everyday practices, the senior leaders could still identify strategies they were using that stemmed from the work they did as part of *Secondary Talk*. Examples from the interviews included focussing on tier 2 and 3 vocabulary, using tutor time to discuss world events, paired reading, ‘Talk Targets’, modelling good practice and checking understanding. They could also identify how *Secondary Talk* had impacted upon the strategic direction of the school. This included time in the staff meeting to discuss communication, systems for monitoring intervention and staff training. At the end of year 3 **all schools interviewed reported that communication was in their school development plan.**

Thematic analysis also shows *how Secondary Talk* develops in schools. Recognition at senior leadership level is essential in ensuring that the programme first spreads within schools, and then is sustained over time. Having speaking and listening in the school development plan ensures this strategic focus. Alongside this, it

is important that staff have some simple, well defined, tangible approaches or resources to ‘hook’ *Secondary Talk* on to.

*“Yes it’s on our school development plan so it’s something every department is involved in that needs to be followed up by the SLT (senior leadership team) line management of course and some of our CPD is going to be on that as well.”*

Head of English and Senior Teacher, St Anne’s

The main barriers to its successful spread are identified as changes within school such as staff turnover, leadership change, or change in focus due to some external factor.

A summary of facilitators and barriers can be found in appendix 2.

To illustrate the process described in the majority of school interviewed, the pattern of development was analysed in more depth in one school. The school journey over the first, second and third years for Fazakerley High School in Merseyside is plotted in the following chart:

## Year 1

### pre-programme

- pointer from recent Ofsted report about progressing from good to outstanding
- small to medium school (844 on roll)
- pre-existing Literacy group with cross subject representation to coordinate ST

### first term

- Coordinating group of three comprising SENCo, Teachfirst teacher and Asst Head
- pre-existing Word of the Week initiative re-focused by ST on tier 2 vocabulary
- pre-existing Talk Box in each class strengthened by ST.
- quick win ST approaches impress wider staff who adopt them enthusiastically

### second term

- peer recommendation of trialled ST approaches by non-English teachers carries weight
- Clear expectation from Leadership that selected approaches are used across KS3
- set of visual reminders about aspects of ST approaches provided to all classes

### third term

- all teachers have contributed individually trialled and developed ST approaches to Talk Box resource
- range of approaches firmly embedded in practice
- frequent opportunities for staff to share and reflect on SLC-supportive practice
- School validated by I CAN at Enhanced level

## Year 2

- Focus on communication and 'oracy' embedded into school development plan
- Extended Talk Box activities from English department across whole school, as well as word of the week vocabulary competitions, voice box and student voice
- CPD and training programme developed so that whole inset days are focussed on developing communication across the curriculum
- Identification of children with SLCN now formalised
- Focus on SLC(N) formed part of leadership observations

## Year 3

- Importance of spoken language continues to be an identified priority in development plan
- 'deeply ingrained within school practice'
- Staff regularly model good practice, pupils actively identify good and poor communication
- Lots of 'No Pen Days' and lessons based around discussion.
- Focus on speaking is timetabled in to the academic year, for CPD, in the school improvement plan, school evaluation and departmental evaluation.
- Detention is now 'Resolution Time' with more focus on talking and articulating what has happened. This will continue to be developed in the coming year.

## Impact on pupils

Data to measure impact on pupils has been collected from three main sources:

- **Qualitative data** from interviews with senior members of school staff, including their ratings of impact during year 1 (n=11) and year 2 (n=9) and in year 3 (n=7) and their judgement about the continued impact. These interviews were carried out by a member of I CAN staff who was not involved in the project.
- **Attainment data from the National Pupil Database.** 13 schools who started implementing *Secondary Talk* at the beginning of Year 1 of this evaluation were identified within the national dataset; we looked at teacher assessment at KS2 and at KS3 in English, Maths and Science. The data for all 13 schools was amalgamated to compare attainment across three years: 2008 - 2013. This represents before, during and after *Secondary Talk*. This enables us to see trends before the programme was implemented in progress students were making, compared to after *Secondary Talk*. The data does not look at the same students year on year, but it compares the attainment of students in the same year groups. They are controlled as far as possible regarding similar characteristics using the demographics of the schools.
- Results of a **small comparison study** of two schools in Derbyshire.

### Comparison of pupil outcome data in two schools

Two schools were recruited, one implementing *Secondary Talk* and one who did not. Because of some difficulty recruiting schools to take part in the study, there was a delay to the start of data collection in the comparison school. This difficulty also means that although there are some similarities between the schools, they are not completely matched in their demographics.

Both schools are smaller than average (with n=550 and n=673 pupils respectively) and have below average numbers of children from BME communities.

However the intervention school has higher than average numbers of children eligible for pupil premium. It also has a higher than average proportion of students with disabilities and those who have special educational needs. The comparison school has below average percentage of pupils eligible for pupil premium and a below average proportion of pupils with disabilities or special educational need.

We report, therefore on the **progress** made by pupils rather than actual levels which vary across the two schools (see below).

A small sample of Year 8 boys was recruited in each school. Each school was asked to identify pupils with typical language, poor language and those with identified speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).

An independent assessor – a speech and language therapist experienced in working with adolescents – carried out a range of assessments, tasks and interviews with each pupil group:

- Two subtests of the Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals (CELF-4), a standardised language assessment: Word Classes and Understanding Spoken Paragraphs

- A standardised assessment of executive loaded working memory. This was included as a measure of cognitive ability that is not expected to change as a result of the intervention

- Tasks which investigated word learning skills, discourse and confidence in different communication situations

- Interview questions which asked students to reflect on their performance in tests and tasks, and to identify strategies which had helped them to carry them out

In each school we also carried out interviews with staff, observations of practice and pupil focus groups.

In **the intervention school** which implemented *Secondary Talk* (n=9) there is repeat data from 3 years Y8, Y9 and Y10. In **the comparison school** which has not implemented *Secondary Talk* (n=10) there is repeat data from 2 years Y8 and Y9. Quantitative data has been collated and analysed using SPSS. Aspects of the qualitative data have been transcribed and thematically analysed using NVivo software.

	October 2012	December 2013	December 2014
Intervention school	Secondary Talk in progress		Outcome data Time 3
	Baseline data Time 1	Outcome data Time 2	
Comparison schools	Not recruited	Baseline data Time 1	Outcome data Time 2

Further data collection, outside the scope of this current evaluation, is scheduled in a year's time to monitor continued impact.

### ***Progress in language and communication***

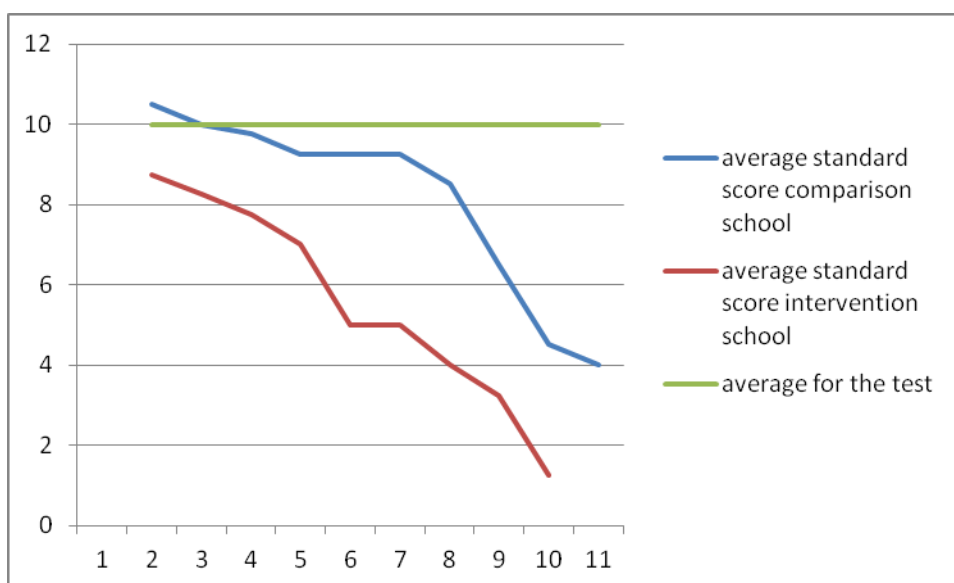
Over the three year evaluation, at the end of each year we interviewed a member of the management team who was not directly connected with the project in their school. Interviewees were asked to rate impact on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being no impact and 10 being impact across the whole school), and also asked more open ended questions.

Over the first two years, the average rating for the impact on language and communication rose to 7.6: *Secondary Talk* having an impact across most of the school. In the third year, interviewees rated whether progress has been sustained, increased or decreased since last year. All six senior leaders interviewed this year who responded to this question felt that **the impact on language and communication had either improved or been sustained.**

Over the three years of the evaluation, there is increasing evidence about impact on language and communication from pupils in **the focused study in two schools in Derbyshire**. From the outset, there have been noticeable differences in the language skills in the two schools.

These two schools are located in very different demographic areas. The intervention school is in an inner city area, an area of significant deprivation whereas the comparison is in a rural market town with much less deprivation.

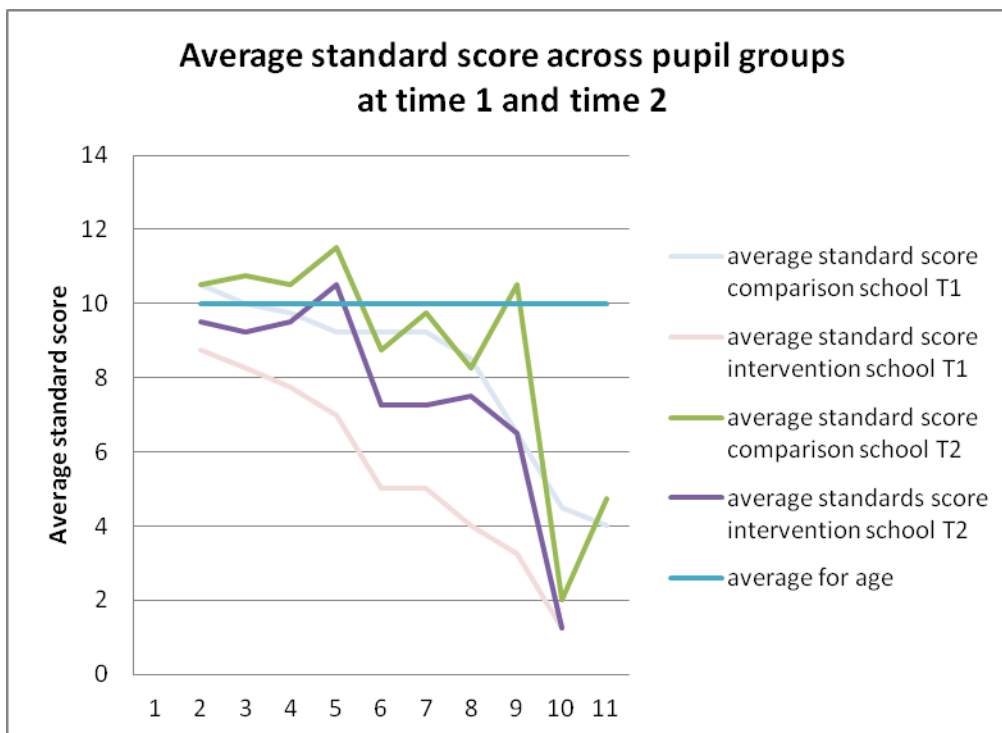
There were differences **at baseline** between the two schools and represents the students that staff selected. Each school was asked to identify pupils with typical language, poor language and those with identified speech, language and communication needs (SLCN):



This pattern reflects what is known about the association between poor language and social disadvantage.

After two years, it is possible to look at the difference in the schools. Because of the demographic differences between the schools, and the differing levels of language (above), **the progress** of pupils rather than actual levels is compared.



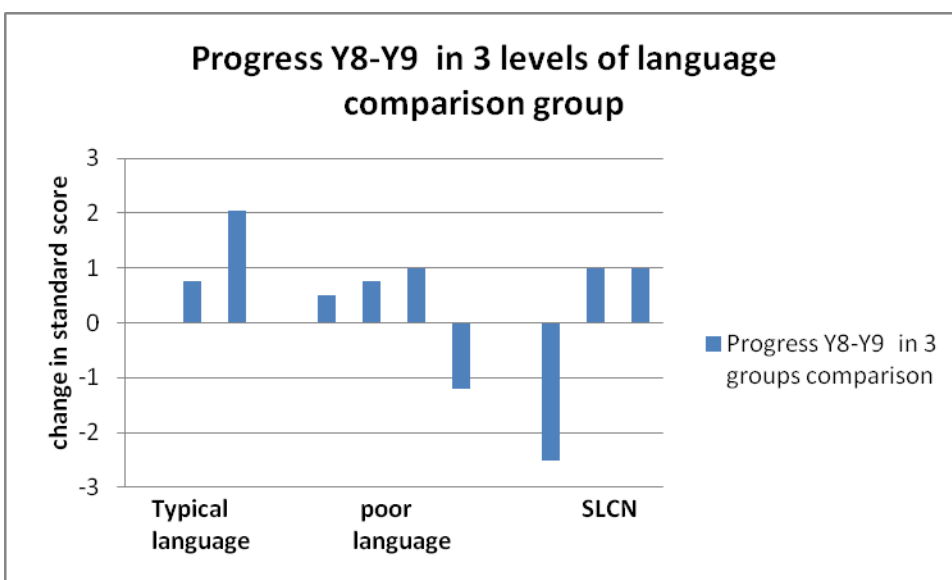
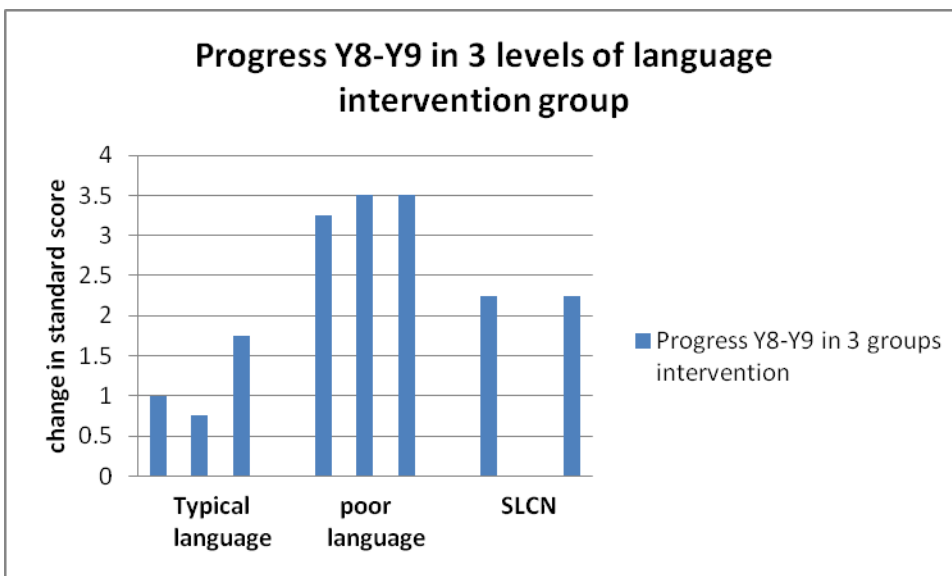


The chart above shows average standard scores on subtests of the Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals (CELF-4) assessment for both the intervention and the comparison group. Time 1 scores are in pastel colour, the heavier colours show average scores for time 2.

This shows more progress for the intervention group than for the comparison group. **The gap between them narrows.** Despite this progress, student across language groups remain behind their peers with typical language.

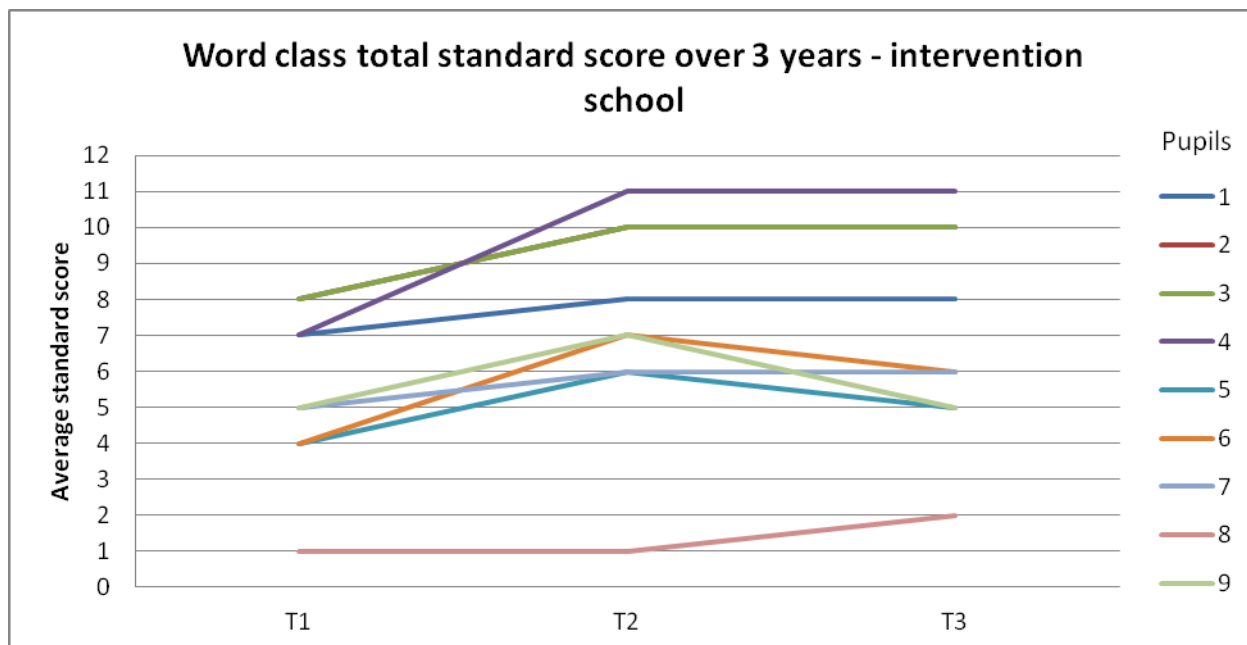
Crucially, assessment on standardised language tests shows that after *Secondary Talk*, **students make statistically significant progress in aspects of understanding language and in expressing themselves.** This progress is not seen in students who attend a school not engaged in *Secondary Talk*.

This progress is **most evident in students identified as having poor language skills** compared to those with typical language development or those with identified SLCN. Although these students do still make progress.



This shows clearly the amount of change across groups, but also that in the school with *Secondary Talk*, the **most progress is made for pupils with poor language.**

Finally, looking at the progress made in the intervention school over three years, a pattern is seen where initial progress is sustained, but tails off in the third year:



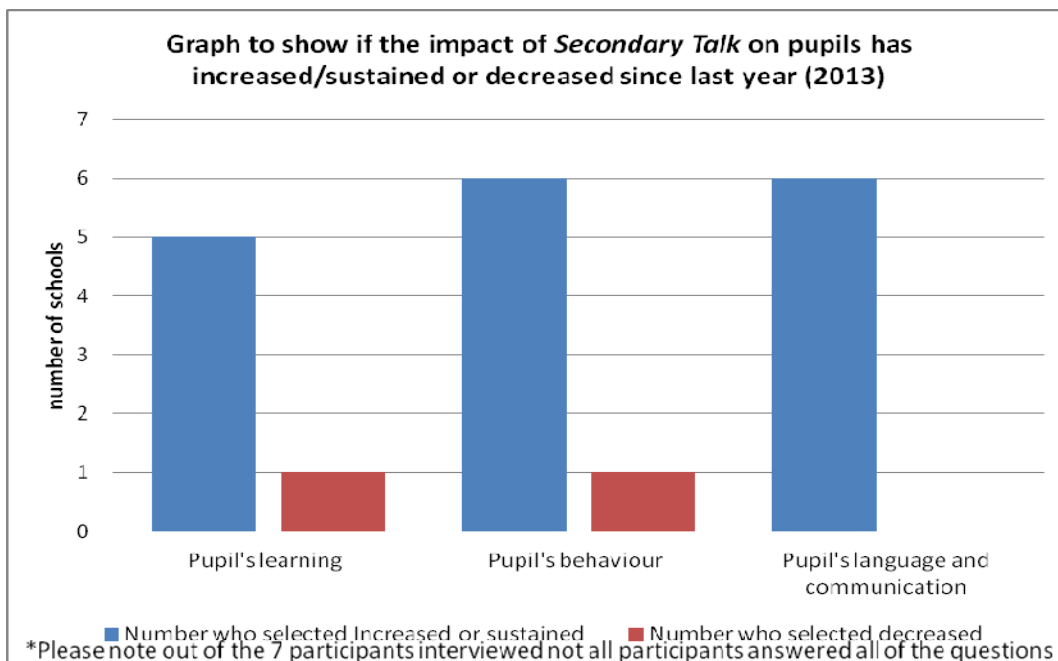
#### ***Progress in learning***

In the first two years, interviewees were asked to rate the impact on a likert scale of 1 to 10 (1 being no impact and 10 being impact across the whole school). After two years, asked to rate the impact of *Secondary Talk* on pupils’ learning, the average rating for the impact on learning and attainment was 8: *Secondary Talk* having a **high impact** on attainment and learning across **most of the school**. This was the same average rating as first year; schools felt that *Secondary Talk* had continued to have an impact on learning.

Senior leaders were highlighting *Secondary Talk* as a major contributory factor in increasing attainment within specific subject areas and /or year groups, with some senior leaders making clear links between the *Secondary Talk* strategies and improved student learning. Students also identified *Secondary Talk* strategies as helping them to learn:

*‘It really does pay off because to be able to hear what the fellow students are doing with it helps affirm your ideas and also allows you to develop them if you’re not quite there’*

Three years on, interviewees rated whether progress has been sustained, increased or decreased since last year. In most schools, three years after initial implementation **there continued to be a reported impact** on pupils’ learning, communication and behaviour:



*I think being engaged and active in their learning has increased in three years.*

Head of English and Senior Teacher, St Annes

Some schools identified specific groups of students benefitted more than others, but many agreed that there was more of a focus in school on the links between language and learning.

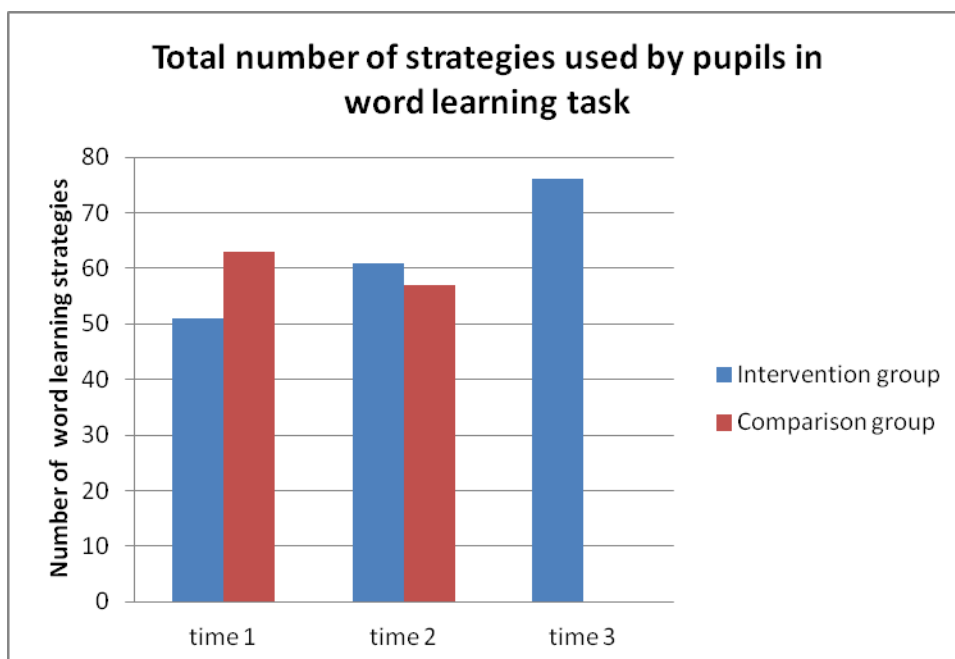
*“the thing I am conscious of I think is the spreading out amongst staff in understanding of the importance of vocabulary, tier 2 vocabulary and also the language for thinking a lot of work has gone in to helping students to understand what words like analyse, evaluate, describe, explain staff are much more aware that students can fall down in exams because they haven't understood the question because they haven't understood the thinking words that are in the question. I think that's been good and also "what does this word mean" not assuming that students will have a slightly more academic vocabulary and only the tier 3 words need to be taught. That's definitely been a very positive result.”*

Teacher in charge of the speech and language base, Preston Manor School

Detailed analysis of data from the small focused study of the two schools in Derbyshire provides more information about how pupils' approach to learning changes. Three areas of interest were noted in particular:

1. *Secondary Talk* helps students to use **more positive strategies for learning**. There are **fewer reactive** strategies e.g. 'I just try and get on with my work', 'I just try harder' and a move towards **more planned, supportive** strategies such as directing mental processes (e.g. visualising, 'slowing it down in my head'), organising and planning (e.g. 'I think about the task and where to start', 'I use a mind map').

2. In particular, students in the school implementing *Secondary Talk* used **more word learning strategies after involvement in *Secondary Talk***, and this difference is statistically significant. Knowledge of words is an important factor in learning. In secondary aged students, measures of vocabulary have been shown to be the most effective and efficient predictors of performance in both reading comprehension as well as learning and understanding information in lessons.

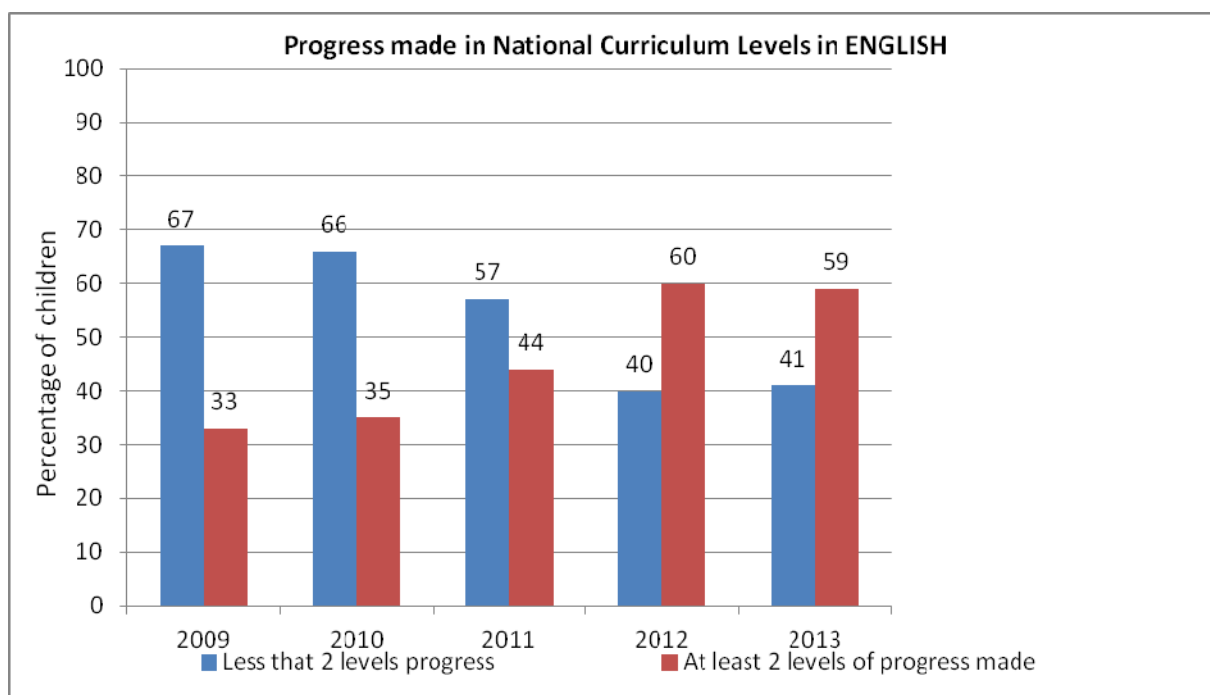


3. After *Secondary Talk* students **were able to reflect on their performance more accurately**. They have improved meta-cognition, known to be important for learning. However, in the school in an area of disadvantage they still tended to over-report their competence. This may be the result of poor language skills. *Secondary Talk* may be most beneficial to this group of students with poor language in areas of deprivation.
4. Looking at the trends in **whole school attainment data** (as *Secondary Talk* is a whole school programme) we looked at the number of pupils reaching expected levels at the end of Key Stage 3 (Level 5) in English, maths and science. Data was analysed four years before *Secondary Talk* in the intervention school, and two years after it started (between 2008 and 2013). Collecting data across these years gives a picture of trends before and after *Secondary Talk*.

In both schools, more pupils reach the expected level in 2013, but a comparison of scores from 2012 (when *Secondary Talk* started in the intervention school) and 2013, showed that **in the intervention school 29% more children reached expected level in English in 2013 compared to only 4.5% increase in the comparison school – nearly six times as much progress**. This difference is pleasing, but the fact a very high percentage of pupils in the comparison school are already reaching expected levels means they have less room for increase, so these findings are reported with caution.

This is supported by analysis of the wider dataset from 13 schools who implemented *Secondary Talk*. Looking at the data across six years: 2008-2013, again representing before, during and after *Secondary*

Talk this allows us to look at trends for the whole school, which will include pupils who have been involved with *Secondary Talk*:



The trend is for pupils to make more progress after *Secondary Talk* is implemented. It is not possible to say that these trends are a direct result of *Secondary Talk*, but in collecting data from a range of sources we aim to triangulate and therefore strengthen evidence of this relationship

### ***Progress in behaviour and social/emotional skills***

In the second year interviews with school leaders the average rating for the impact on behaviour was 7.6: *Secondary Talk* having **an impact across most of the school**. This represented a slight increase of 0.1 from the first year.

In most of the schools senior leaders specifically mentioned the link between language, communication and behaviour – and were able to identify examples of changes to students’ behaviour. They were clear that due to improved communication skills, students were less likely to act up and more likely to sort things out verbally.

In the third year interviews, six out of the seven senior leaders interviewed felt that **the impact on behaviour had been sustained or increased**.

Overall, interviewees found it harder to identify specific impacts, but they could see that they had adopted more talk-based approaches to behaviour management.

*“we’ve got work to do but it will involve talk so things like detentions are becoming Resolution Time and there’s more debate, well discussion and reflection of “what did you do, what could you do” and making them more meaningful “*

In some schools, robust monitoring systems showed a decrease in behaviour incidents since engaging in *Secondary Talk*, and these are linked to the strategies and approaches adopted through the programme. Many schools reported examples of how talk-based learning kept students engaged and helped to reduce low level behaviour incidences. However, there were also challenges identified with recognition that there was more work to be done in helping staff see the link between communication and behaviour “*we wanted staff to understand the students when they're reporting something that's happened don't always have the narrative skills*”.

## 2. Impact on practice and whole school policies

Over the first two years of the evaluation observations, pupil and teacher questionnaires and pupil focus groups were carried out in *Secondary Talk* and non *Secondary Talk* lessons. This data was collected before the start of *Secondary Talk* and then again after one year.

In addition to these observations, pupil focus groups and interviews have been carried out in the two schools in the focused study, allowing comparison between a *Secondary Talk* and non *Secondary Talk* school.

As well as this data, senior leaders in their interviews were asked questions relating to changes to practice.

### What pupils say

Pupils found it difficult to accurately judge how their teachers supported communication but pupil focus groups produced some interesting findings. They reported more interaction in lessons, with some pupils able to link this to how it helped them learn. They also noticed teachers using a wider range of approaches, which encouraged communication. They talked about teachers explaining things in different ways to ensure everyone understood, using colour coded ‘log books’ to flag when they didn’t understand thus allowing time for thinking. In particular students talked about a range of ways to help with learning new words in lesson. Students were able to explicitly identify these strategies as being helpful.

Most pupils in focus groups reflected on ‘good’ and ‘bad’ lessons – ones that they found it harder to learn in. Key features of more positive lessons for learning were those where teachers made time for questioning, and supported students with this. Students talked about not being put on the spot in front of the whole class:

*‘So it’s good to have teachers who don’t just stay still, who walk around the classroom and look at your work to see if you’ve done it right and if you haven’t they just say “ooh just think about this”’*

*‘Sometimes they make it more enjoyable and then you like focus more. But sometimes the teacher just stands there talking all the time’*

### What teachers say

In the second year of the evaluation, repeat **teacher observations** were carried out in five of eight schools. There was no increase in the use of communication-supporting strategies used in lessons, and no observed differences between *Secondary Talk* and non *Secondary Talk* lessons. Methodological limitations may have influenced this: Very often different teachers were observed each year, teaching a different year group. As the programme develops in schools it is increasingly difficult to find comparison non-*Secondary Talk* lessons.

However, observations have also been carried out **in the focused study** in the two Derbyshire schools. The same teachers were observed teaching one year apart. One school had been taking part in *Secondary Talk* in that year and the other had not. The teacher in the Intervention school was observed to be using 13 more strategies to support communication in the second year than they were in the first (a 41% increase). In the comparison school the teacher was observed to be using fewer strategies than the previous year (a decrease of 17%).

Despite this increase, there were still qualitative differences between lessons in the two schools. Practice in the comparison school is still stronger in supporting pupils' communication.

**Teacher questionnaires** were completed at the beginning of *Secondary Talk* and then one year later.

Although only a small sample returned the questionnaire, results are interesting, particularly in the analysis of the strategies they reported using. The differences seemed to be in the amount of structure and level of explicitness when talking about language and communication, the focus on evaluation, and in the involvement of students:

Before <i>Secondary Talk</i> , baseline observation	One year after <i>Secondary Talk</i> started
<p>Many strategies were reported to be in use, reflecting good quality first teaching, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Highlighting key words, and word learning: a focus on explaining etymology and spellings</li> <li>- Opportunities for discussion and group work, debate</li> <li>- Use of visuals such as role play, displays, modelling</li> </ul>	<p>Again, many strategies reported:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A continued focus on key words</li> <li>- Clear links to national curriculum requirements</li> <li>- Mentions of interactive activities</li> <li>- Many visual approaches identified</li> </ul>
<p>Some specific, focused approaches used e.g. use of signposts and explicit phrases for students to use in lessons. However, <b>many more general approaches</b> e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reading out aloud</li> </ul>	<p><b>Differences</b> were shown in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increased structure given to students so they know <b>how</b> to improve communication skills: 'explicitly teach the differences between formal and informal English', 'describe key</li> </ul>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- An open and safe environment</li> <li>- Encourage pupils to repeat</li> <li>- Insisting on speaking in full sentences, on full and clear answers</li> </ul> <p>Limited focus on supporting pupils in how to develop communication skills, or in evaluating how effective their approaches were e.g. <i>'I think I do but am not sure it is effective'</i></p>	<p>skills, showing them videos'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A focus on evaluation – both from the teacher but also between <i>students 'feedback areas that need improving'</i>, <i>evaluating each others' performance'</i>, <i>'reflect and compare to key skills/talk targets'</i></li> <li>- Increase involvement of students <i>'choose a pupil to explain the task in their own words'</i>, <i>'encourage students to act as a dictionary investigator'</i></li> </ul>
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### What senior leaders in school say

After two years, when interviewed, senior staff reported an **impact on staff knowledge to be sustained, rating it slightly higher** than the previous year. Similarly, they also felt that *Secondary Talk* had had a **sustained impact on teaching practice** across most of the school. In all but one school, these ratings have either sustained or increased. In the third year interviews, 80% of interviewees felt the impact had sustained or increased.

Many interview responses talked about a move to **explicitly** teaching or prompting aspects of language and communication– the difference between *knowing* about an approach and *putting it into practice*.

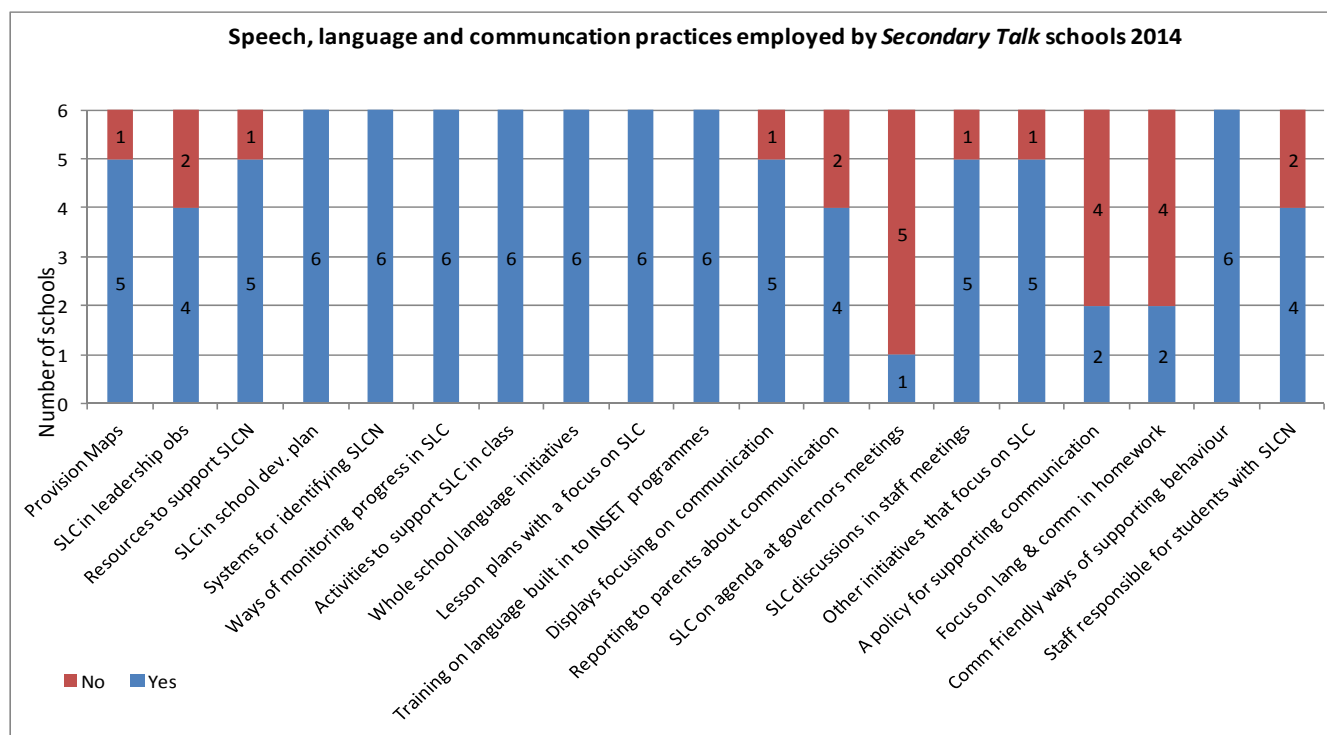
*I think the staff being aware of how they can support students' language development through explicitly trying to teach vocabulary, through explicitly trying to encourage students to use more academic type language is something that is increasing in terms of staff awareness of how important a role that has to play in children's learning and their understanding as well as what they hear and what they read.*

Teacher in charge of speech and language resource, Preston Manor School

### Changes to whole school policy

The senior leaders interviewed were also asked to reflect upon changes to whole school strategy since taking part in *Secondary Talk*. After two years, they talked about *Secondary Talk* as a catalyst to embedding a focus on communication at school policy level but it was difficult for some to isolate the influence of the programme.

In the third year, senior leaders found it even harder to isolate the influence of *Secondary Talk*. As part of interviews, senior leaders were asked to complete a grid to say which school systems had been in place before *Secondary Talk* and which were implemented as a result of *Secondary Talk*. The chart below shows which communication supportive strategies the schools identified that they use.



**After three years, speech, language and communication is a feature of many policies and practices across schools. In all six schools, speech, language and communication is in the school development plan – an identified driver for change.**

However, many senior leaders felt that these aspects of policy and practice had always been in place and found it difficult to identify *Secondary Talk* as the catalyst. As we have similar grids and interviews from year one and two of the evaluation, it is possible to track the development and see the extent of the programme impact. Our evidence from earlier interviews clearly shows the lack of these systems pre-*Secondary Talk*.

The fact that many interviewees in the third year see this as ‘custom and practice’ in school reflects how embedded *Secondary Talk* principles have become.

### **Conclusions and implications for practice**

Implementing a whole school language programme, *Secondary Talk*, has a significant impact on students’ language, with resultant impacts on their learning in secondary school. Students with poor language make most progress, narrowing the gap between them and their peers.

Significant impacts are seen one year after the programme starts, with progress sustained after this but levelling off.

These impacts are accompanied by specific, structured changes to teaching practice in which strategies are introduced, students are taught how to benefit from them and progress is monitored. Furthermore, as a

result of *Secondary Talk* school systems change so that a whole school focus on language and communication is identified as a priority, and embedded as ‘business as usual’.

A qualitative difference is seen in the language levels of pupils, and in teaching practice in a disadvantaged area compared with a school in a more affluent area. Although both student performance and practice change in the disadvantaged school, they do not catch up with their peers or colleagues in a more affluent school. *Secondary Talk* may potentially have a unique role in supporting students with poor language in disadvantaged areas.

Change characterises secondary schools – at practice and policy levels. In order to sustain development for protracted periods, schools may need regular ‘refreshers’ or ‘prompts’.

There appear to be associations between language level, engagement, school demographics, culture and students’ approach to learning which would benefit from further investigation. There are indications that engagement in learning is not a stable concept during adolescence. The Government’s ‘character education’ agenda will be helpful to see whether these traits can be changed.

Evaluating whole school language initiatives can be methodologically challenging and this project presents some useful solutions to these challenges. Evaluating a programme that grows in schools which themselves also change, means that it is important to include a range of measures. Standardised assessments are useful when accompanied by more tailored tasks and qualitative interview data. The use of self-report may be challenging for students who have poor language associated with deprivation. A skilled assessor, used to working with adolescents with language difficulties helps to gather accurate and comprehensive data.

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**In collaboration with**

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**May 2015**

## Appendix

**Appendix 1: Data Collection schedule and evaluation activities.** Completed activities are shaded:  proposed activities are shaded:

	September 2011	January – May 2012	July 2012	September - December 2012	January – May 2013	September – December 2013	January – May 2014	September – December 2014	January – May 2015	March 2016	
Cohort 1 (x schools) Sample for whole school data	Secondary Talk project taking place			Interviews with senior staff. Whole school data collection		Interviews with senior staff. Whole school data collection		Interviews with senior staff. Whole school data collection			
Cohort 2 (x schools) Sample for classroom observations		Secondary Talk project taking place		Lesson observations, pupil focus groups and questionnaire		Lesson observations, pupil focus groups and questionnaire					
Data analysis			Informal, descriptive analysis		Descriptive analysis		Descriptive and inferential analysis				
Reporting					March 2013 interim report		March 2014 interim report		March 2015 full evaluation report		Final evaluation report
Monitoring data of reach and spread collected throughout											

**Focused comparison project in 2 schools**

	October 2012	January 2013	March 2013	December 2013	December 2014		December 2015	March 2016
Intervention school	Baseline data collected	Secondary Talk in progress			Follow up data		Follow up data	Final evaluation report (delayed til April 2016)
Comparison school	Delay in recruiting comparison school			Baseline data	Follow up data		Follow up data	

## Appendix 2 Facilitators and barriers in implementing *Secondary Talk*

Facilitators	Barriers
Active endorsement of Head teacher and wider Leadership team for implementation of <i>Secondary Talk</i> .	An absence of facilitating factors.
School's self evaluation process has highlighted the need for support in SLC skills and the ST programme is recorded as addressing this need within the school development plan.	Enthusiasm of school coordinator for supporting students' SLC/N substitutes for thorough planning of how <i>Secondary Talk</i> can be most effective.
ST training explains the link between SLC skills and literacy, behaviour, social disadvantage, and achievement.	Lack of resources (e.g. time for school coordinators to coax and coach colleagues to use the materials etc).
The school introduces an ST approach at the outset which is likely to lead to 'quick wins' for teachers – benefits of using the approach are quickly evident.	First ST approaches to be introduced are challenging for teachers to adopt.
The school is clear at the outset about how the programme is structured and milestones occurring during the ST year.	Provision of ST training or other inputs is seen by coordinator / school as ends in themselves.
The school coordinator has accessible versions of selected approaches to communicate expectations succinctly to colleagues.	The school coordinator of ST is the SENCo, leading to the programme being seen as 'only for SEN students'.
School staff are clear about the importance of taking baseline measures prior to introducing strategies, so that progress can be judged reliably.	Staff are not adequately supported to translate training about how to support students' SLC/N into classroom practice.
The school uses pre-existing communities of interest (e.g. Literacy group, Inclusion champions) to support the introduction of ST.	Changes to the curriculum which de-emphasize the importance of Speaking and Listening skills.
Aims of ST are communicated to students and their opinions are sought and used to develop good practice.	Staff turnover – an enthusiastic advocate of using ST approaches leaves the school.
The school nurtures a classroom culture in which an acknowledgement of language difficulties is seen as a normal part of learning and not something to evoke embarrassment in pupils asking for help.	A poor Ofsted report leads to the school focusing on 'quick fixes' to address highlighted weaknesses. Generally this detracts from efforts to develop students' language skills (seen as a longer term aim).
The expertise of specialist staff (i.e. specialist language teachers or HLTAs) is used to reinforce good practice and demonstrate its benefits to others.	Attempting too much change within a short period leading to staff resistance.
Over time, the importance of spoken language becomes central to the school's culture and intrinsic to professional dialogue, even if particular ST approaches are no longer in use.	Difficulty arising from competing demands from a range of initiatives within school – particularly relating to scheduling training at whole school level.