

Information and Impact

Supporting the improvement of young people's communication skills before they leave secondary school is crucial to helping them participate fully in learning and successfully make the transition to employment or further training.



During the *Secondary Talk* pilot, approximately:

- **1,600 staff** became more aware of the important role that speech, language and communication play in students' learning
- **300 staff** have received more in-depth training about speech, language and communication
- **2,800 students** were supported directly through Secondary Talk through changes in the way lessons are delivered and their communication development supported
- **12,000 students** were reached learning about the importance of speech, language and communication

During 2008/9 I CAN developed its innovative programme Secondary Talk – aiming to improve attainment, engagement with learning and behaviour in secondary schools through a focus on students' communication skills.

In 2010, the programme was piloted in 12 mainstream secondary schools and 2 special schools (one for pupils with specific language difficulties, one for pupils with emotional, social and behaviour difficulties).

Schools were in 3 regions of England: the South West, Midlands and Greater London, giving wide demographic representation. Seven schools were located in the 30% most deprived areas of England, 2 schools in the 10% most deprived areas.

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Secondary Talk impacts

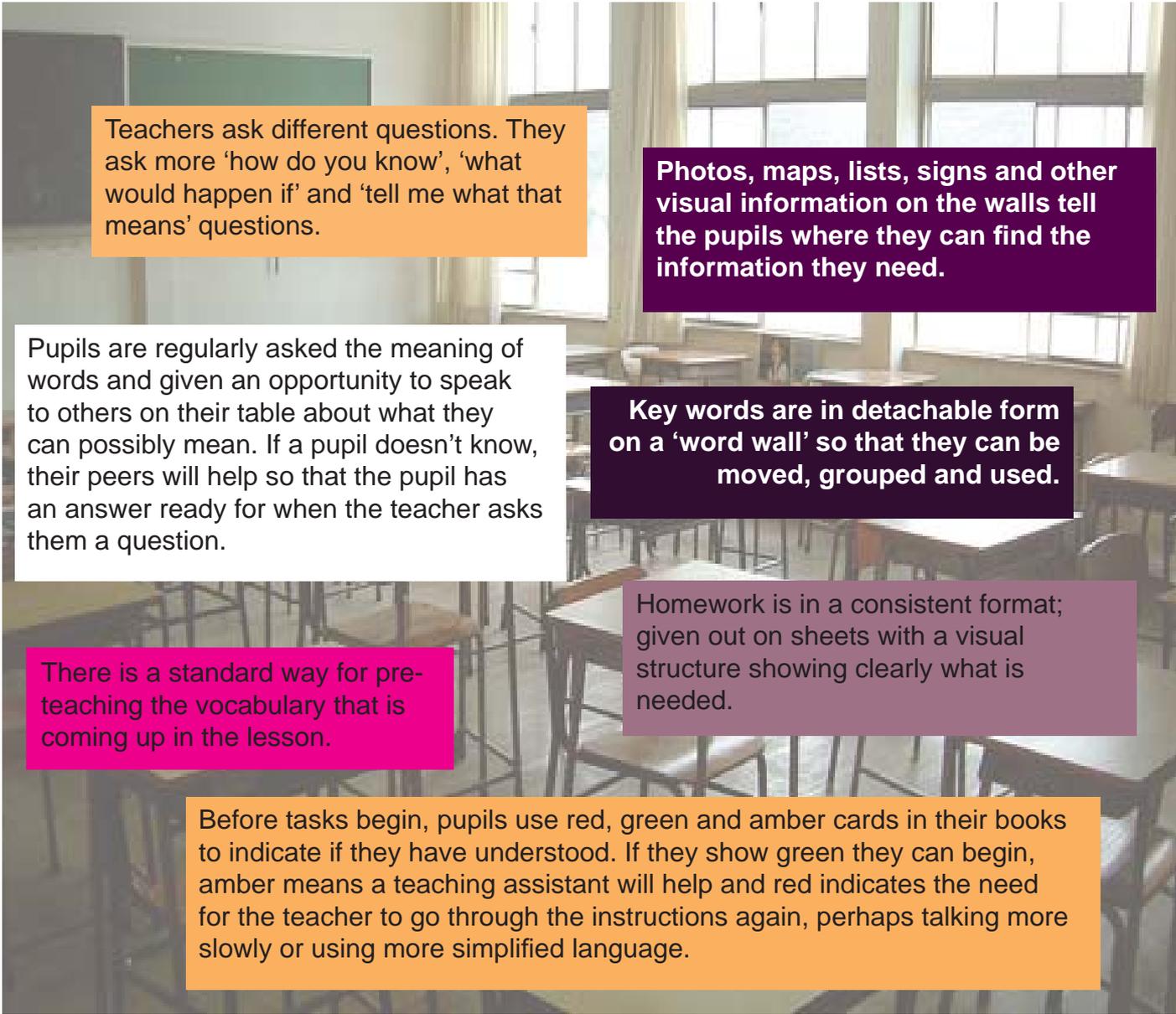
The pilot of *Secondary Talk* is being formally evaluated by the University of Sheffield. The evaluation team has gathered data from staff, pupils and school managers through observation, questionnaires, interviews, pupil focus groups and analysis of school data. This external academic evaluation is supplemented with additional impact data and feedback from I CAN's engagement with *Secondary Talk* demonstrating the impact on:

- Students' engagement with learning, attainment, behaviour and awareness of their own and others' speech, language and communication
- Changes to practice in schools i.e. how *Secondary Talk* has supported schools in supporting young peoples' communication
- Changes to staff confidence and knowledge in supporting young peoples' communication
- Changes to school systems so that they recognise the importance of, and have a focus on, speech, language and communication



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Creating a communication-supportive classroom



Teachers ask different questions. They ask more 'how do you know', 'what would happen if' and 'tell me what that means' questions.

Photos, maps, lists, signs and other visual information on the walls tell the pupils where they can find the information they need.

Pupils are regularly asked the meaning of words and given an opportunity to speak to others on their table about what they can possibly mean. If a pupil doesn't know, their peers will help so that the pupil has an answer ready for when the teacher asks them a question.

Key words are in detachable form on a 'word wall' so that they can be moved, grouped and used.

There is a standard way for pre-teaching the vocabulary that is coming up in the lesson.

Homework is in a consistent format; given out on sheets with a visual structure showing clearly what is needed.

Before tasks begin, pupils use red, green and amber cards in their books to indicate if they have understood. If they show green they can begin, amber means a teaching assistant will help and red indicates the need for the teacher to go through the instructions again, perhaps talking more slowly or using more simplified language.

"We try to provide a communication supportive environment across the whole school because that is what the children need so they can learn. All students benefit from that - it is not put on for any particular students – it is about ensuring everyone can learn and achieve."

Barbara Myerson, Head of Communications at Robert Blake Science College, Bridgwater

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Secondary Talk's ripple-effect

The programme starts by being focused in specific year groups or subjects, but very quickly spreads across the school in a kind of ripple effect to impact on more staff, lessons and pupils.

Key to supporting students' communication is giving them opportunities to talk to each other – which also creates a more dynamic peer to peer environment that is not teacher-centred. At Dormers Wells High School, Ealing, one morning showed the following range of communication-supportive practice:

Lesson 1: Yr 12 Sociology: Students talked to each other to discuss aspects related to generational poverty. There was discussion in pairs before using narrative frames for writing.

Lesson 2: Yr 11 Science: Students were shown 3 pictures. Without any other teacher information, they were asked to work in pairs to make a story / narrative about what linked the images.

Lesson 3: Yr 7 Music: Groups of 4 students worked together using role cards to structure how they interacted (students take the roles of musician, timer, technician, leader).

Lesson 4: Yr 7 French: Teacher puts A, B, C, around the wall. Teacher used whiteboard to pose multiple choice questions relating to French grammar and possessive nouns. Students took positions about correct answer and then persuaded others to change position, using a *Secondary Talk* technique: vote with your feet.

Lesson 5: Yr 12 PE: Teacher used the interactive whiteboard with subject specific vocabulary. When each word was revealed, students had 30 seconds to tell their partner a definition and examples of the word in a sentence.

Lesson 6: Yr 8 English: During a lesson on ghost story construction, pupils link pictures using narrative frames, and generating vocabulary to use for each bit of the story.

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Talking Targets

"I think this way of teaching really helps to make you more aware of what you're doing, and the communication skills we're practising."

Park Hall Academy, Solihull



Teachers start off lessons by explaining what students will learn, but also highlight a number of talking targets. These vary according to what different students need to think about and include such things as to: *'Take time before putting your hand up to answer', 'Check you understand words with a partner', 'Make sure you look at the person who are talking to.'*

These talking targets are written on cards and posted on the wall so that staff can refer to them during lessons – and praise pupils who achieve them.

"After doing the talk targets, we understand our own strengths and difficulties with language and communication."

Pupil, Park Hall Academy, Solihull

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Secondary Talk Evaluation, University of Sheffield

- The schools engaged in *Secondary Talk* have been very positive and all people interviewed, both pupils and staff, needed very little prompting to talk about the programme. As a result we can identify clear strengths of *Secondary Talk* as well as where we can focus our attention in future roll outs of the programme.
- A clear advantage of *Secondary Talk* is that it is flexible. Each school appreciated this and implemented it differently to respond to their individual priorities making it is less burdensome and more 'doable'.
- A strength of implementing *Secondary Talk* in schools was that it facilitated networking and the sharing of good practice between staff about their pupils' speaking and listening and language and communication. Thus, there is more likely to be a longer term impact of the programme – with indications that *Secondary Talk* provides an impetus for change
- Preliminary data analyses suggests that *Secondary Talk* can enhance teacher's knowledge of pupils spoken language and communication which in turn allows them to feel more confident about identifying pupils with spoken language and communication needs.
- Most *Secondary Talk* Coordinators in the schools rated the programme as having a high impact on teaching practice and on pupils' learning and were very satisfied with the content and delivery of the programme. They felt that the programme was worth the effort that their school had to put in and in this sense it was good value for money.
- In some schools there were clear changes to practice in classrooms, and these are currently being analysed for significance



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Secondary Talk impacts on behaviour

“I suddenly realised that many of these previously excluded students have a much better understanding of what the lesson is about just by making simple adjustments to the way I talk. These things take a bit of practice but really help the students understand.”

In St Magdalene Academy, Islington staff have used a range of resources to support students with behaviour difficulties. They use a framework to explain to students what went wrong in situations rather than overloading them with spoken language that they don't understand. Students use a structured chart to help explain their feelings and what helps them. Staff have also learned to slow down their rate of talking and to pause after giving an instruction so that students have time to process information. These approaches now underpin all their work with difficult to manage students.



One pupil found Spanish lessons particularly difficult. She was taught how to use an 'emotional scale' to explain how she was feeling and what would help her to calm down. This takes away the emphasis on having to verbally explain to mainstream teachers. Teachers have really noticed the difference. The Spanish teacher now has ways of supporting the behaviour, rarely has problems and comments that the pupil is “one of my top students”

“It's a great support for students who before would just have got more angry.”

In Estover Community College, Plymouth, a student with a diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Disorder and associated behavioural difficulties reported that the Secondary Talk resources have really helped him to know what he has to do in class. His behavioural incidents reduced by 32% over the course of the year, and staff attribute this to the visual approach to communication and structuring his activities.

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Secondary Talk impacts on attainment

“Two years ago, Contextual Value Added scores for our students were in the bottom 15%, now they are in the top 5%. We’ve achieved an 85% reduction of days lost to fixed term exclusions. Although *Secondary Talk* is not the sole causal factor in these improvements, it has certainly provided a significant CPD and operational focus for our continuing work to address these issues.” Tony Morrison, Principal, Park Hall Academy, Birmingham

“Teachers I have spoken to who have increased the amount of focussed talking/listening (group/paired)activities into their lessons as a result of *ST* have reported increased confidence in all students when explaining outcomes at the end of investigations or topics. Also a willingness to contribute.” Annie Gillings, SENCO, Sir John Hunt Community Sports College, Plymouth

“The I CAN *Secondary Talk* project has been a great support in St. Boniface’s drive to help pupils and staff concentrate upon the importance of the language they use to assist in the learning process. We have used the quality resources not only to focus upon those who have the poorer communication skills within our community but also to challenge those who are considered the more able, our A-level students. The project has slotted in very nicely with our whole school aim of improving learning via learning habits - thanks to all involved, it’s been fun.” A. Davies, Deputy Head, St Boniface’s College, Plymouth

“I would say that *Secondary Talk* has been really useful in raising the profile of language and students’ understanding of spoken language – along with the impact on performance. It’s really focused us on teaching points such as increasing thinking time.” Annie Tindale, Deputy Head Teacher, Woodfield School, Coventry

**To find out how *Secondary Talk* could work in your school, contact I CAN today.
0845 225 4072 www.ican.org.uk/secondarytalk or email secondarytalk@ican.org.uk.**

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