

**Speech and
Language UK** 
Changing young lives.

Confident young futures

Our 2023-2028 strategy

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Foreword from our CEO

1.9 million children. That's how many children between the ages of 5 and 15 are currently struggling with talking and understanding words. This is the highest number we've ever recorded – so our new strategy must be more ambitious than ever.

An unbearable number of children are going through life unable to do things many of us take for granted. This affects every aspect of their and their families' lives. They are more likely to fail in key subjects at school, more likely to be lonely and have mental health problems, more likely to end up in the criminal justice system and more likely to be out of work as an adult. So many people care about all these social problems, but don't recognise the massive link with speech and language challenges. We need to change that.

These 1.9 million children and their families need support. But right now, not enough teachers, parents, politicians or funders understand the reality of these children's lives or the solutions that already exist. This leaves children with unnecessarily uncertain futures, struggling with their mental health and unable to build happy, successful lives.

At Speech and Language UK (and previously as I CAN), we work to give every child the skills they need to face the future with confidence. We know the solutions which

will transform young lives. But we can't reach enough children without more people recognising what needs to be done and supporting us to act.

We are confident in our new strategy, which will take our tools and training to more schools and nurseries across the UK and our advice to more families and young people and will put more pressure on politicians to prioritise speech and language challenges. We are confident because we heard from more than 700 family members, supporters and educators as we worked it out. We were told our combination of tools and training for schools and nurseries, advice to families and young people and campaigning was crucial.

Together, we can give more children confident futures.

1.9 million children cannot afford to wait for change. We are calling on everyone who can help them to join us and change young lives.

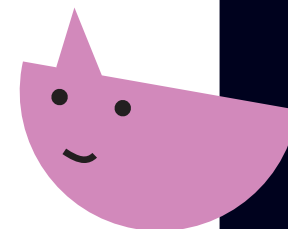


Jane Harris
CEO



Our plan

We design innovative tools and training for thousands of nursery staff and teachers to use in their classrooms.



We give families the confidence and skills to help their children.

And we put pressure on politicians to prioritise help for speech and language challenges.

We have a proud history and already transform over 80,000 lives a year. But with the number of children struggling increasing, we know we need to reach more children urgently.

By digitising more of our work, by collaborating with a wider group of people, including young people themselves, by speaking up more powerfully and by investing in our workforce and our infrastructure, we can use our three key methods to reach and impact far more children who need us.

We demand a country in which every child with speech and language challenges has the skills they need to face the future with confidence.

Here's how we will achieve it.

Aim 1

Make speech and language central to more schools' and nurseries' everyday practice across the UK

We provide schools and nurseries with life-changing tools that they can use without needing specialist input from speech and language therapists. We train teachers and early years staff so they can change how they interact with children and young people in the classroom every day, and have trained over 7,000 professionals.

But that is not enough. Speech therapists are a scarce resource in the UK, and we must conserve this for those children who really need specialist support. Over the next five years we will make sure our innovative tools and training reach even more schools (both primary and secondary) and nurseries.

We'll create an online speech and language learning platform so we can reach more schools and nurseries, evaluate our existing programmes even more rigorously, expand our training for school and nursery staff, work with teacher training providers and update our existing training.

We will create new and innovative tools and invest in our existing programmes and resources – with updates to Early Talk Boost, What Works and Early Talk.

By 2028 we will:

- **Have launched** a new online speech and language learning platform, a new Early Talk training programme and have undertaken an even more rigorous evaluation of Early Talk Boost in conjunction with the Education Endowment Foundation.
- **Have collaborated** on a new *What Works* database with the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists and a new screening tool in collaboration with Cardiff Metropolitan University.
- **Have trained** thousands more early years staff every year, so they can change their everyday practice, working in partnership with the Education Development Trust.



Aim 2

Make our two schools leading examples for speech and language practice

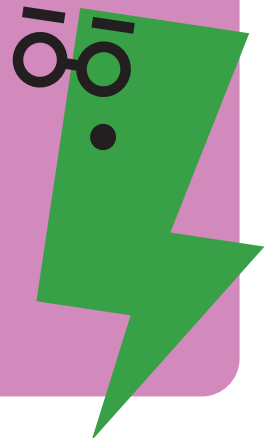
Our schools are judged as “outstanding” by Ofsted and have a distinctive model of a curriculum co-designed and delivered by teachers and speech and language therapists. We conduct research regularly in our schools to make sure our practices are delivering the right outcomes for children. We will continue to improve the learning, mental health and independence of our pupils.

We want our schools to have an impact beyond the school gates. We will record more evidence of what works at our schools so we can share learnings with more teachers in other schools and help more children. We will develop new ways of embedding these learnings into schools.

We will upgrade facilities at our schools, so they match the quality of education and therapy that we deliver every day.

By 2028 we will:

- **Have developed** resources about key approaches from our schools that other schools can replicate, expanding our reach.
- **Have redeveloped** the buildings at our Surrey school and expanded the classrooms at our Nottinghamshire school.
- **Have maintained** the high quality of education and residential services in both our schools.



Aim 3

Make sure all families know about speech and language development

Not enough families and carers know how much speech and language development matters – in fact almost 80% of teachers believe parents do not recognise the importance of these skills at all.

Currently 30,000 people each month use our family guidance on our website, accessing hundreds of resources. But we need to do more to make these user-friendly, to reach non-English speakers and to reach young people directly.

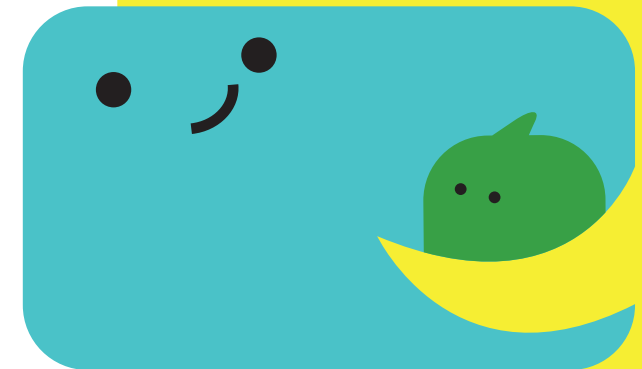
We will ask families and young people what they need to understand better and listen to

what they say. We will put more of our tools online, provide more advice before birth and partner with more publishers and content providers who can reach more families and young people than we could alone.

We know of other charities who are producing high-quality advice for families and young people on specific speech and language challenges. We will talk to families and young people to understand where there are gaps so that we spend our time filling them rather than duplicating existing content without a purpose.

By 2028 we will:

- **Have reached** tens of thousands more families.
- **Have created** advice for young people on the topics that really matter to them.
- **Have accredited** our email and phone-based advice service.
- **Have partnered** with at least five general content providers.



Aim 4

Make sure speech and language is at the forefront of the political agenda

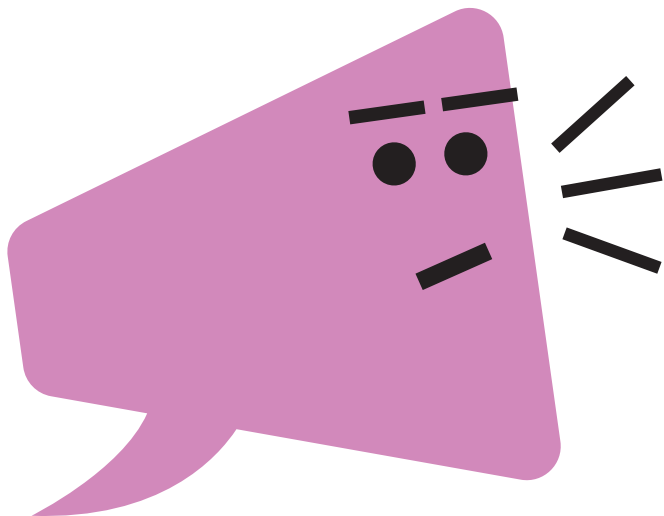
To support the 1.9 million children who need us, national education policies must change.

We will push the Government to fund support for every child who needs it, including providing and developing tools to check how they are doing and specialist support for children with lifelong challenges. We will demand that children are able to get specialist speech and language therapy when they need it without waiting for years.

The evidence for why speech and language challenges matter to children's futures is already very strong, but not recognised enough. We will make the case more

powerfully, adding the stories of families whose children struggle with speech and language, making sure that politicians see and hear those affected. We will make it clear that tackling social problems like falling educational standards, rising mental health challenges and high youth offending is impossible without better speech and language support.

We will use our expertise to influence parliamentary bills and consultations, while increasing our supporter base of people all over the country who can influence their local politicians.



By 2028 we will:

- **Have measurably changed** Government policy through our advocacy.
- **See regular stories** in the mainstream media about the experiences of children with speech and language challenges and their families, increasing our media reach by 25%.
- **Have started** to organise a movement of young people and families who are regularly pushing for national and local change.

Aim 5

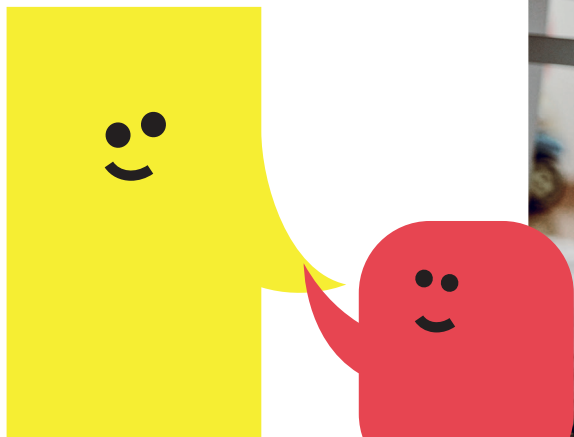
Make sure our culture, infrastructure and funding model is fit for the future

To achieve our ambitious goals, we need to make sure our organisation is effective and values led.

We will improve our processes to make sure our national teams and school staff work more collaboratively, as well as taking steps to make sure staff feel more supported and listened to.

We will aim to be led by the experience of the people using our services and work towards becoming an anti-racist organisation, as well as commissioning an independent review of our governance.

We will also improve our technology and diversify our funding to make sure the charity can support children for decades to come.



By 2028 we will:

- **Have conducted** annual staff surveys and an independent review of governance.
- **Have established** a reliable new public fundraising stream.
- **Have measurably improved** our record on diversity and anti-racism.



How we achieve this: together

Speech and Language UK is able to help people all over the UK because thousands of people chip in money and volunteer their time.

Whether you're a teacher, a parent or neither, we all play unique roles in transforming the lives of children who struggle with talking and understanding words.

None of this work is possible without our community - a community that makes sure every child has the skills to face the future with confidence.

Together, we will win the changes we need from Government, the education system and the NHS to help children all over the UK get the future they deserve.

How we developed our strategy

- We looked at where we were making the most difference to children's lives and our biggest strength was clear - we are making a huge impact across the UK because of our ability to translate speech and language expertise into forms that other people can use - educators, families and young people, and policymakers.
- We asked families and educators about what we do and what was most important to them. They wanted us to deliver tools and training for schools and nurseries, advice for families and young people and influential policy campaigns.
- We looked at our weaknesses too - more people need to know about our issue urgently, we need to make our infrastructure and funding more flexible to match our culture. We don't always have enough families or young people we help involved in our decisions.
- We assessed the risks and opportunities we face. We saw a huge opportunity in our new Speech and Language UK brand, as well as in new technology and in a changing political landscape. This was balanced by constraints on public spending, the cost-of-living crisis and inflation.
- We developed a theory of change (see appendix 1) and decided we could increase our reach and impact by digitising more of our work, partnering more, developing a stronger movement and messaging, and investing in infrastructure.
- We developed a series of projects to deliver our strategy and consulted with Speech and Language UK staff and our partner organisations.
- We developed an impact and effectiveness framework to measure the results of our strategy.

How we'll measure our success

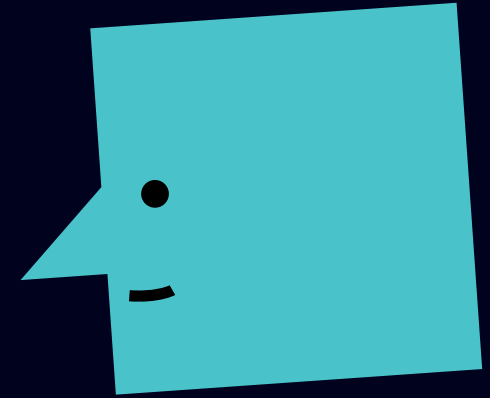
We will track our progress through a new impact and effectiveness framework, and we will conduct a review of our whole strategy after two years to check our progress and make sure our charity is working in the best way to support children and families that need us.

We will continue to consult with the children, young people, families and educators who use our tools, training and advice and ask our supporters how we are doing.

Thank you to everyone who already supports us in this vital work. And thank you to anyone who is considering helping to change young lives.

Appendix 1:

Our theory of change



More children with challenges talking and understanding words can face the future with confidence.

More of the children's workforce adopting practices

Widely used evidence-based tools



More practices from our specialist speech and language schools used by non-specialist schools



More families able to support and advocate for their children

More empowered and self-aware young people



More language policies and Government messaging that encourage:

- early identification
- use of good tools
- workforce development
- family knowledge



Responsive culture, infrastructure and funding model



Speech and Language UK

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Speech and Language UK is the operating name of I CAN Charity, a registered charity in England and Wales (210031) and Scotland (SC039947), which is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (00099629). Registered address: 2 Angel Gate, Hall Street, London, EC1V 2PT

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