CASE STUDY

Fonthill Primary School, Bristol

Our Inclusion Coordinator was inspired by hearing Jean Gross speak at a SENCO conference about her work as England's Communication Champion for children. This led to Fonthill Primary School making a Communication Commitment to develop our approach to supporting our pupils to develop their communication skills.

Getting Started

We began by assessing our current provision using the Communication Commitment's review checklist. This helped to focus attention on five key areas and highlighted clear priorities for development. The materials provided by the Communication Commitment were very well-organised and the questions prompted us through to creating a very thorough action plan, which was incorporated into our School Improvement Plan.

To launch our focus on communication, all classes took part in *No Pens Day Wednesday*. This was a huge success and greatly enjoyed by the children. Activities included debates, drama, hot-seating, reciting poems, storytelling games, role play and circle time games. Some classes also discussed different methods of communication and learnt some sign language.

Staff training to develop communication-friendly classrooms

A speech and language therapist was commissioned from Child Speech to support with training staff. Together, planned four INSET sessions for all teachers and teaching assistants, focusing on the five components of attention and listening, vocabulary, building sentences, telling stories and conversations. These sessions also included background information about the importance of communication, understanding the component elements of communication and identifying and supporting children with speech, language and communication needs.

All staff were asked to complete the Speech, Language and Communication Framework (SLCF) at Universal level. This highlighted strengths and areas for development in staff skills and knowledge. The audit will be repeated at the end of the year to show the progress that has been made and to identify the next steps for staff development.

Teachers and teaching assistants used the Communication Supporting Classroom Observation Tool or Communication Friendly Checklist for self- and peer-evaluation to identify elements of the language learning environment, opportunities and interactions that

they used in their classroom to support the development of children's communication skills. This provided opportunities for staff to share good practice and to discuss next steps.

The staff training has also linked in well with other school priorities such as developing the use of inference in reading and using Talk for Writing strategies as a structured way of children orally rehearsing and developing narratives before writing. For example, through discussion about communication, teachers have realised that one of the factors impacting on pupils' reading progress is poor understanding of vocabulary.

One strategy from the staff training that teachers found particularly useful was the STAR approach to teaching vocabulary (Select, Teach, Activate, Revisit). Teachers realised that they frequently taught higher level vocabulary that children could use to enrich their writing, but that many of our children also needed to be taught "Goldilocks" words – those that are not too easy and not too hard, but just right; words that are needed to understand the topic or text and likely to be encountered again in other contexts. To follow this up, we have purchased the book 'Word Aware' by Anna Branagan and Stephen Parsons to provide further strategies and resources for teaching vocabulary in whole class work and in pre-teaching intervention groups.

Evidence-based interventions

Following research using the Communication Trust's *What Works* database of evidenced interventions, the Inclusion Co-ordinator, Reception class teacher and a teaching assistant attended training about Talk Boost. This was then set up as an intervention for small groups of Reception children. The first group of four children have just finished the sessions and have demonstrated huge improvements in their speech, language and communication skills. All of these children have caught up with their peers and are now demonstrating these skills at a level that is at least average for their age.

For Key Stage 2, Inference Training intervention groups have been introduced for children with poor reading comprehension skills. The sessions use interactive group discussions to focus on activating and applying prior knowledge, developing vocabulary, generating and answering questions, generating inferences and summarising and retelling the short texts. Although primarily aimed at developing reading skills, these sessions have also had a strong impact on communication skills and provide opportunities to teach and practise group discussion skills.

We also commissioned a speech and language therapist from Child Speech to work in school about once a fortnight. We used her expertise to assess a small number of children and to liaise with the NHS speech and language therapist about further resources to support children who were already receiving therapy input. Many of these children are seen infrequently by the NHS therapist and a programme is left in school to be carried out by a teaching assistant. The school therapist has worked with these teaching assistants to model and share ways of further extending the programme in order to achieve the best outcomes for the children. When reassessed by the NHS therapist, these children showed very good progress and all had met the target set by the therapist. The school therapist has also set up an intervention to teach understanding of concepts to an individual child with learning difficulties and provided advice to teachers about supporting individual children with working memory difficulties.

Identification of children needing support

We purchased the Speech, Language and Communication Progression Tools for each age group. We have begun using these to screen all children in order to identify children who need specialist support or a targeted intervention. It is time-consuming to assess each child, but the tool provides valuable information about their development and a profile of their strengths and needs. The data for each child is compiled by the Inclusion Coordinator so that patterns can be identified across year groups. The tool is also used before and after speech, language and communication interventions to monitor progress over time and evaluate the success of interventions.

Early intervention

Research has frequently highlighted the importance of early intervention. The school speech and language therapist worked closely with the nursery staff to identify children needing support and to implement strategies that could be used to support children. A coffee morning was held for parents to informally meet with the speech and language therapist to discuss any concerns or questions about their child's development of speech, language and communication. We are now planning a series of Chatterbox sessions for parents, led by the therapist and the nursery teacher, about the importance of good speech and language development and how this can be supported and encouraged at home as well as in school. We have also planned regular articles for the school newsletter to raise awareness among parents and share top tips.

Evaluation

We are only six months into our focus on communication, but we are already seeing impact. Staff have a better understanding of communication and of speech, language and communication needs and are aware of the importance of communication for learning, literacy, behaviour and social interaction. High quality teaching includes a range of classroom strategies to support communication across the school and pupils are given opportunities to learn and practise communication skills. Children with speech, language and communication needs are identified earlier and we have a range of well-delivered interventions to support them. Children who have received targeted or specialist support have made very good progress in their speech, language and communication. We are beginning to raise awareness among parents of the importance of communication and how they can support their child's development of speech, language and communication skills.

The Communication Commitment and other resources from The Communication Trust have been invaluable in supporting and guiding us through developing a clear action plan, identifying evidence-based practice from other schools, purchasing high-quality resources and evaluating our progress and further areas for development. Working with speech and language therapists from Child Speech has also been instrumental in providing access to expertise and support from passionate professionals.

Over the next year, and beyond, we will continue to embed classroom strategies and targeted support and further develop the information and support that we provide to parents about communication in order to ensure that our pupils move on to secondary school with the skills that they need to be successful in their learning and beyond education.