



I CAN Talk about Talk Secondary

Evaluation Report December 2017

Executive Summary

Year on year employers report that young people lack the necessary communication skills for the work place (CBI 2007 - 2016). *Talk about Talk Secondary* is a 12 lesson training and mentoring intervention, for young people aged 13-16, preparing them to co-deliver a workshop to employers about communication difficulties. The programme has been piloted and evaluated in 15 schools across England and Wales over a two year period.

The evaluation has found that as a result of participating in *Talk about Talk Secondary*, young people have improved communication skills (as rated by school staff) and can rate their own communication skills more accurately. They have improved team working and presentation skills. Staff members are more confident in understanding the link between communication and behaviour and can identify strategies for supporting young peoples' communication. Staff members enjoyed delivering the programme and plan to run it again with other groups of young people.

Headline findings

Impact on Young People

- Young people found communicating easier after *Talk about Talk Secondary*, especially in relation to teamwork
 - *"I have definitely improved. I can even speak in front of others more confidently whereas before I would do anything to avoid it."*
- Young people became significantly¹ more aware of their own strengths and difficulties – an important skill for learning.
- Staff reported increases in the self-esteem and confidence of young people and said that the young people were better communicators after *Talk about Talk Secondary*, particularly in team working.
- Young people taking part in *Talk about Talk Secondary* made significant² progress in checking and asking for clarification when confused, changing their style of talking and their ability to listen– progress not seen in a group who didn't take part in the programme. These are all skills employers rate highly as being vital for the workplace.
- After *Talk about Talk Secondary*, young people were more work-ready as a result of improved communication skills.

¹We have only used the term "significantly" in this report if statistical analysis has shown a significant difference in scores.

² As above

Impact on Staff

- After *Talk about Talk Secondary*, school staff felt more confident in supporting young peoples' communication skills. This meant they used strategies such as pausing and simplifying their own instructions.
- Staff were very positive about *Talk about Talk Secondary*:
 - *"it has been one of the best things we have done with our students"*
- After *Talk about Talk Secondary*, all (100%) staff trained understood the link between language difficulties and behaviour. For some this was new information.

1. Introduction and background

Year on year employers state that the young people they employ lack the communication skills necessary for the work place (CBI 2007 - 2016). Programmes to develop the communication skills that support other 'soft' employability skills such as team working, time management and problem-solving have been found to have an impact (Lifeskills 2014, Grant 2010, Melvin 2010), yet they are not routinely built into the secondary school curriculum.

Children and young people with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) have difficulties with spoken language. They may have problems understanding spoken language, putting their thoughts into words and sentences, or difficulty interacting with others. Up to 80% of young people in some secondary schools have SLCN—particularly in areas of social deprivation. A significant number, around 10%, have long-term difficulties: a language disorder as an identified special educational need requiring specialist support. Despite these high numbers, people working in secondary schools are not confident in supporting spoken language or in identifying those young people needing additional support (The Communication Trust 2017). Young people with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) are potentially disadvantaged in the job market as a result of their needs either not being identified or not effectively supported (Burns 2016).

Assessment of communication skills in secondary aged pupils can be challenging. Tests available are often not sensitive enough to pick up changes following intervention in adolescents' language and communication (Lesaux 2010, Spencer et al 2012). Assessment of functional communication skills such listening, adjusting style of communication according to situation, monitoring understanding, teamwork, non verbal communication, those skills needed for the workplace, is even more challenging. This difficulty with assessing 'ephemeral' communication skills was cited as a reason for withdrawing spoken language assessment from contributing to GCSE English award (DfE 2014). Without suitable measures, it is very difficult to identify young people with communication difficulties, plan targets for support, or to determine which interventions are most effective.

The current study evaluates the delivery of a 12 lesson training and mentoring intervention, for young people aged 13-16 with SLCN, preparing them to co-deliver a workshop to employers about communication difficulties. As part of this evaluation, new measures for identifying and measuring progress in adolescents' functional communication were piloted.

2. Aims of project

The project was designed to have multiple outcomes for three groups: young people, school staff and employers.

Talk About Talk Secondary aimed to:

For young people

- 1) Improve young people's communication skills.
- 2) Increase young people's awareness of the importance of effective communication in the workplace.
- 3) Increase young people's ability to reflect on and evaluate their own communication skills

For schools

- 4) Increase secondary school staff's awareness of SLCN and their ability to use strategies to support communication skills

For Employers

- 5) Improve employers and employees awareness of the nature and prevalence of communication difficulties and how to support people with these difficulties

3. Delivering Talk about Talk Secondary in Schools

Talk about Talk Secondary is a training and mentoring intervention aimed at students in Years 9, 10 and 11 (Secondary 3-5 in Scotland) who have language difficulties that are not always identified. It develops the communication skills students needed to acquire other employability skills such as team working, time management and problem-solving.

In a series of 12 lessons, trained school staff mentored students so they could co-deliver workshops about communication to local employers. Through this and through tutoring sessions between workshops, students learnt, practised and improved their communication and presentation skills.

These skills were tracked throughout the programme using a range of measures.

The pilot began during the autumn term 2015 with schools receiving staff training, delivered by I CAN. Part 1 of the training covered speech, language and communication needs and how these present in secondary schools. Part 2 covered delivery of the intervention itself.

Following staff training, I CAN staff also delivered an induction session to the selected student groups, which was observed by school staff who then took over running the programme.

For a range of practical reasons, staff and student training was staggered throughout the autumn term. Schools began delivering the programme between autumn term 2015 and spring term 2016.

Schools originally wanted flexibility in how they delivered the programme's content. However, feedback from schools during pilot confirmed that pre-planned lesson content was viewed as most practical for the staff delivering the programme. Materials were thus revised and schools joining the pilot in Year 2 (academic year 2016-17) followed the same pre-planned lesson content format.

The final version of the programme has been informed by feedback from school staff throughout the pilot implementation period and now consists of:

- One day staff training
- 12 lessons in 3 equal 'phases' which cover
 1. Introduction to communication
 2. Preparation to deliver a practice workshop

3. Preparation to deliver an Employers' workshop
 - An additional 13th course review lesson
 - Fully manualised lesson plans and accompanying digital content
 - Student handbook to support reflection and implementation of learning
 - The *Talk for Work* profiling tool

4. Evaluation design: Overview

No numbers without stories, no stories without numbers

I CAN's [evaluation approach](#) is based on a Theory of Change model in which we use a mix of methods, academic support and rigorous, meaningful evidence to demonstrate the impact of our programmes.

This approach has been used in the design and implementation of the *Talk about Talk Secondary* evaluation (see Appendix 1 for the Theory of Change model used in this evaluation).

4.1 Participants

Twenty three schools approached I CAN about piloting *Talk about Talk Secondary* and 15 schools in England and Wales went on to deliver the programme. For support in selecting a group of young people to participate in the programme schools were sent Selection Criteria (see Appendix 2 for the Selection Criteria). However to make the programme as practical as possible the final decision about who to include was left with the schools. This meant that not everyone who embarked on or completed the programme fit the selected criteria we provided. Schools were asked to complete an attendance form to track how many students started the programme and how many completed it, however compliance was low and few forms were returned.

The table below shows the number of students and staff who attended the initial training however some of these did not go on to complete the programme for a range of reasons, including staffing challenges and in some cases, engagement challenges created by selecting the wrong pupil group.

Table 1: Number of Participants

| | Number attending initial training |
|--------------|-----------------------------------|
| Young People | 172 |
| Staff | 88 |

Employers were asked to complete an evaluation form after attending the school-run workshop. Evaluation forms from 22 employers across 14 organisations were submitted. This is an under representation of the number of individuals who attended Employers' Workshops as it was difficult to control for schools either issuing evaluation forms or returning completed forms.

4.2 Measures

The *Talk about Talk Secondary* programme was evaluated using a mixed method design. Qualitative and quantitative measures were developed or adapted to determine the impact of the programme against the intended outcomes. Using a range of measures enabled us to triangulate the data to ensure our outcomes were met using rigorous and robust methods.

Staff self-report measure of confidence (adapted from the speech, language and communication framework)³

This is a three point rating scale of staff confidence across a range of competencies including

- Identifying and assessing Speech language and communication needs (SLCN)
- Typical speech, language and communication development
- Positive practice to support SLCN
- Speech, language and communication and behaviour

Staff completed this before and after *Talk about Talk Secondary*.

Young Person's Own Rating of Skills

Before and after *Talk about Talk Secondary* young people rated their communication skills using a 5-point likert scale from 1 (always easy) to 5 (always difficult). School staff recorded how much support the young person needed to do this each time. Previous research tells us that young people with SLCN struggle to accurately rate their own skills (Burrows and Yiga 2012, Joffe and Black 2012). However this is an important skill to teach since accurate self-reflection enables young people to recognise where they have difficulties and use appropriate strategies to support themselves. This vital skill can improve young people's scores on standardised assessments (Zimmerman and Pons 1986) as well as the communication skills targeted in *Talk about Talk Secondary*.

Staff Rating of Young Persons' Skills

School staff rated young peoples' skills using the same 5 point rating before and after *Talk about Talk Secondary*. This enabled us to measure whether staff felt the young peoples' skills had improved after participating in the programme. It would also show whether staff and the young person's ratings became more similar after *Talk about Talk Secondary*, giving a measure of how much more aware of their own skills young people become, and whether they can more accurately reflect on their strengths and difficulties.

Talk for Work profile

This profile was introduced in Year 2; it is a tool that profiles the strengths and difficulties of young people across three areas in relation to the workplace: 1) Understanding; 2) Talking and; 3) Interacting with others. It comprises of:

1. Nine direct questions to ask young people
2. Staff rating of young people skills
3. A self-rating scale for young people which matched the rating scale used in year 1.

After staff and young people have completed the profile the young person receive a colour coded score for each section.

1. **A Green score** means the young person is on track to have good communication skills for the workplace
2. **A red score** suggests the young person could have significant difficulty with communication in this area. Here we recommended that someone looked in more detail at their communication skills, for example the SENCo, as there may be a need for further assessment or investigation.

³ *Speech, Language and Communication Framework*, The Communication Trust (2017)

- 3. An amber score** signals that the young person is showing signs that they may struggle with communication in the workplace and may need further support; these are the young people that we proposed would most benefit from *Talk about Talk Secondary*.

New schools starting the project in Year 2 were asked to use the *Talk for Work* profile with young people before and after *Talk about Talk Secondary* instead of the five point rating scale for both staff and the young person rating.

Staff and Young People Interviews

At the end of the second year school staff and young people were invited to participate in interviews and focus groups. This gave us rich, qualitative data about the implementation of the programme, materials and impact on staff and young people.

These interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and thematically analysed (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Employer Interviews

Employers who had attended the workshop were invited to give feedback on the workshop. Some employers participated in a telephone interview and others gave their responses via email.

Comparison Study

In addition to the larger evaluation of *Talk about Talk Secondary* which involved all schools, an additional small scale comparison study was designed. The purpose of this was to isolate the impact of the programme and increase the rigour of the evaluation. Schools were invited to participate, incentivised by additional impact data and the required three schools volunteered. The fact that they self selected meant that they were enthusiastic about participating and therefore would be willing to support the necessary information and data gathering.

The schools that volunteered were asked to identify a comparison group of young people who were not participating in the programme so that their communication skills could be compared with those of the young people participating in *Talk about Talk Secondary*. The schools were sent guidance on how to match the control group young people with those in the *Talk about Talk Secondary* group. The schools were asked not to tell assessors which young people were which group.

Two assessors (I CAN staff who were not involved in the programme delivery) visited the three schools and met the young people in pairs. The assessors conducted

- 1) **A rating scale** of the young people's communication skills based on a range of observed activities including conversations with each other and the assessors, listening to instructions, asking for help and social communication such as greetings. This rating scale mirrored the scale used in the wider evaluation.
- 2) **A speaking task** based one used in Ealing Council's Youth Offending Speech and Language Therapy (YOSALT) study⁴. The young people participated in pairs. One was asked to describe an everyday activity and their partner was asked to listen and guess what they were describing. The pairs then swapped. The task was filmed and scored using the following criteria
 - a. 1 point for logical order
 - b. 1 point for simple grammar or 2 points for complex grammar
 - c. 1 point for giving context to the narrative
 - d. 1 point for trying to make the story interesting to the listener (for example adding in a joke or extra details)
 - e. 1 point for each of the 7 components

⁴ *Youth Offending Speech and Language Therapy Screening Tool Scoring and Information*, London Borough of Ealing (2011)

The videos were watched and scored by someone who was blind to the condition of the young people, and to whether the recording was before or after the programme. The same person also completed a rating of verbal and non verbal confidence. The Confidence Rating Scales are two 5-point scales in which young peoples' verbal and non verbal confidence is rated on a scale of 1 (not at all confident) to 5 (very confident). If the young person is rated a 5 a further question is posed regarding the appropriateness of their high level of confidence. This helped to identify those students who present as being over confident in comparison with their language competence.

The rating of confidence was developed in collaboration with specialist teachers and speech and language therapists to illustrate the close relationship between confidence and communication. Evaluations of language-focused interventions sometimes find that non specialists report 'improved confidence', when this is actually improved communication skills⁵.

The rating scales show aspects of confidence which are related to verbal and non verbal competence. They were designed to be used with a range of typically developing children and young people, but can be used with students with language needs.

4.3 Design of the evaluation

The measures for this evaluation were collected at three time points:

Time 1 (autumn 2015)

Before they started delivering *Talk about Talk* Secondary schools were asked to complete:

- The staff confidence rating
- Young Person self rating
- Staff rating of young people's skills
- For those schools in the comparison study the assessors visited in this term to collect baseline data

Time 2 (summer 2016)

At the end of the first year school staff collected follow up measures from the young people who had completed the programme. They used the same 5-point rating scales as at Time 1.

Four schools joined the programme at Time 2 and one school started running the programme with a second group. These schools were asked to baseline the young people using the newly developed *Talk for Work* Profile. New staff joining the programme were again asked to rate their confidence using the Staff Self report measure of confidence. Along with these the follow up measures from the Comparison Study were also collected at this time point.

Time 3 (summer 2017)

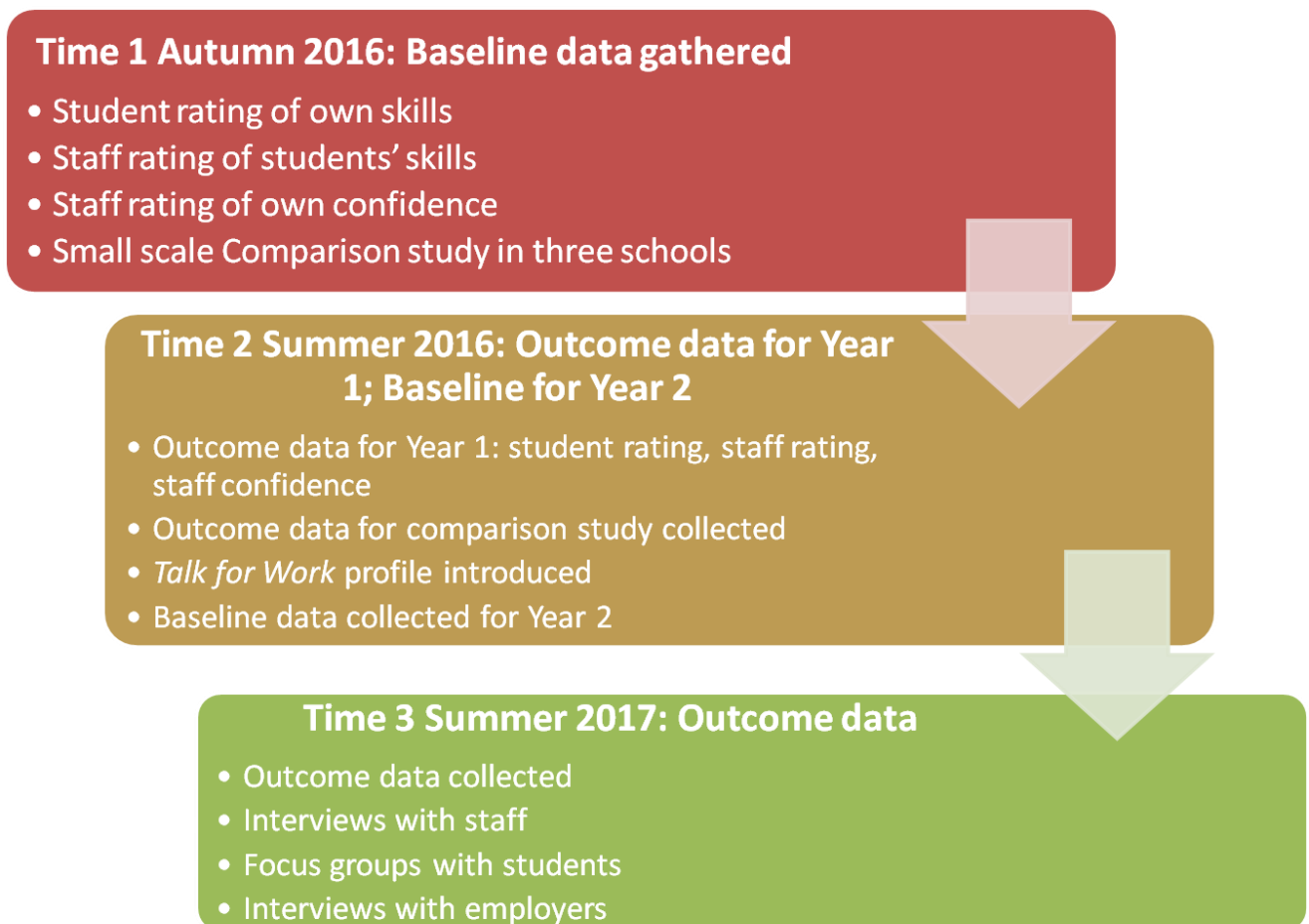
At this stage we collected any outstanding outcome measures including staff confidence ratings, *Talk for Work* profiles and young peoples' self rating scales. We also invited staff, young people and employers to participate in interviews and focus groups to give feedback on the process, materials and impact of the programme.

⁵ *An Evaluation of Talk about Talk*, I CAN (2014)

Table 2: Table of Measures

| Measure | Collected at Time 1 Autumn 2015 | Collected at Time 2 Summer 2016 | Collected at Time 3 Summer 2017 |
|---|------------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|
| Staff Self report measure of confidence | Baseline measures | Outcome measures for year 1 groups and baseline measures for year 2 groups | Outcome measures |
| Staff rating of young people skills | Baseline measures | Outcome measures for year 1 groups and baseline measures for year 2 groups | Outcome measures |
| Young peoples' own rating of skills | Baseline measures | Outcome measures for year 1 groups and baseline measures for year 2 groups | Outcome measures |
| Talk for Work Profile | - | Baseline measures for Year 2 groups | Outcome measures |
| Staff and young people interviews | - | - | Evaluation measures |
| Employer Interviews | - | - | Evaluation measures |
| Comparison Study data | Baseline measures | Outcome measures | - |

Figure 1: Data collection time points for Talk about Talk Secondary



4.4 Demographic information about the Schools

In total fifteen schools took part in *Talk about Talk Secondary* pilot. Originally, 23 schools agreed to participate in the *Talk about Talk Secondary* pilot; however 8 of these did not go onto to deliver the programme. The reasons for this are explored in more detail in the Discussion section.

Each school's latest Ofsted report (Estyn in Wales) was used to to analyse the demographics of the 23 schools. Ofsted and Estyn report on the size of the school compared to the national average, as well as the proportion of pupils who are eligible for pupil premium, learning English as an additional language and with special educational needs or disabilities. This information from the Ofsted (or Estyn) reports was used to compare the schools who participated in the programme. The majority of the schools were academies (n=15; 65%). The average size of secondary school is 950 pupils (Digital Education Resource Archive 2015) Over half of the schools (53%) were larger than the national average and most (62%) had a higher than average proportion of young people eligible for pupil premium. 63% of the schools had an above average (as judged by their latest Ofsted or Estyn Inspection) proportion of young people with special education needs (SEN) and/or disabilities compared to the national average. 58% of the schools had a lower than average number of young people learning English as an Additional Language (EAL). Out of the 23 schools who expressed an interest in participating in the pilot 15 schools completed the intervention at least once. One school delivered the programme to two groups over the two years, nine delivered the programme to one group the first year (see Appendix 3 for a Case Study exploring why schools did not continue with the programme in the second year of the pilot), five joined the pilot year 2 and delivered the programme once and eight schools either did not start the programme at all or started but did not complete it.

Three of the schools who were recruited in Year 2 were special schools; two specifically for young people with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), one for young people with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. From the beginning of the project, there was a lot of interest from special schools in the programme. Although our initial focus was young people with communication difficulties in mainstream schools, recruiting special schools in the second year allowed us to compare progress made for these students, and to identify specific issues in delivering the programme in these places. Learning from these 3 special schools has allowed us to add further differentiation guidance to the programme manual and extended its potential reach.

A table showing the demographic information all for 23 schools is available in the appendices (Appendix 4) and the graphs below give further information about the schools.

A map of the location of all 23 schools is in the appendices (Appendix 5)

Figure 2: Type of school participating in Talk about Talk Secondary

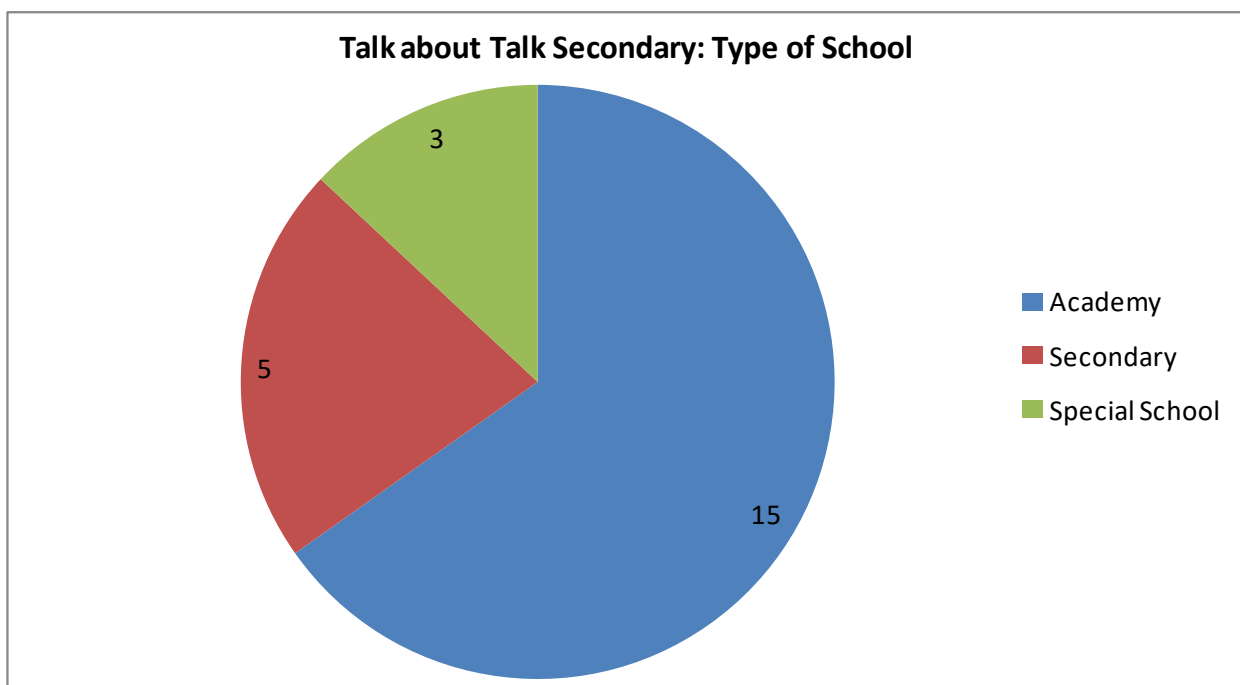


Figure 3: Size of school participating in Talk about Talk Secondary compared to the national average

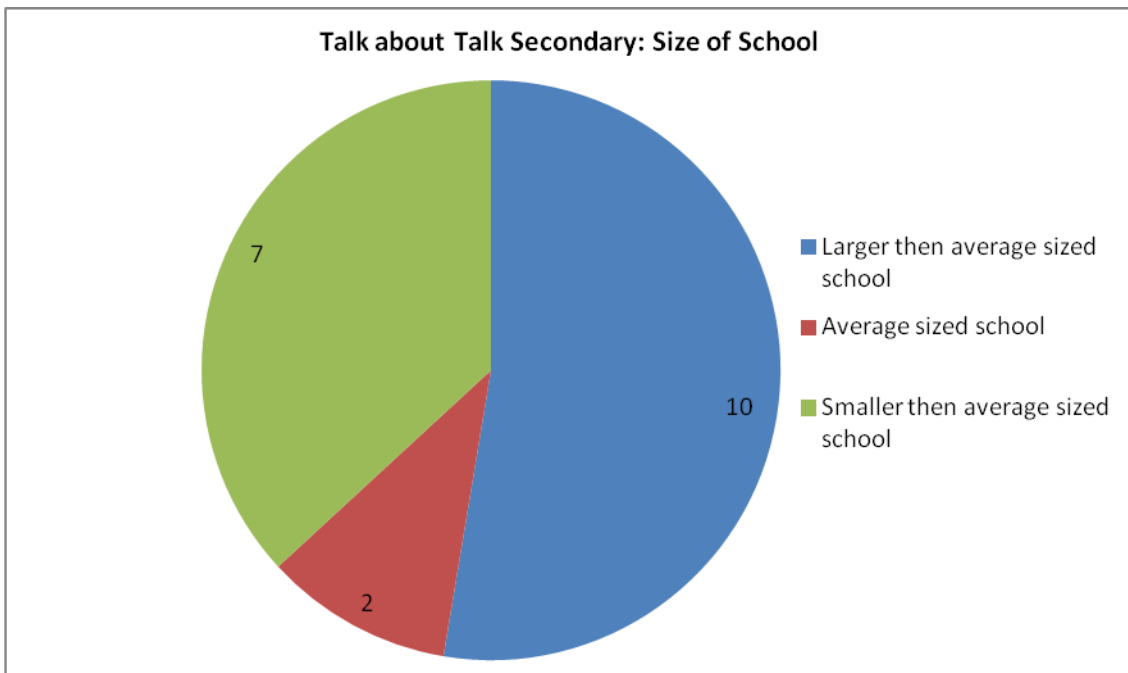


Figure 4: Proportion of young people eligible pupil premium compared to the national average

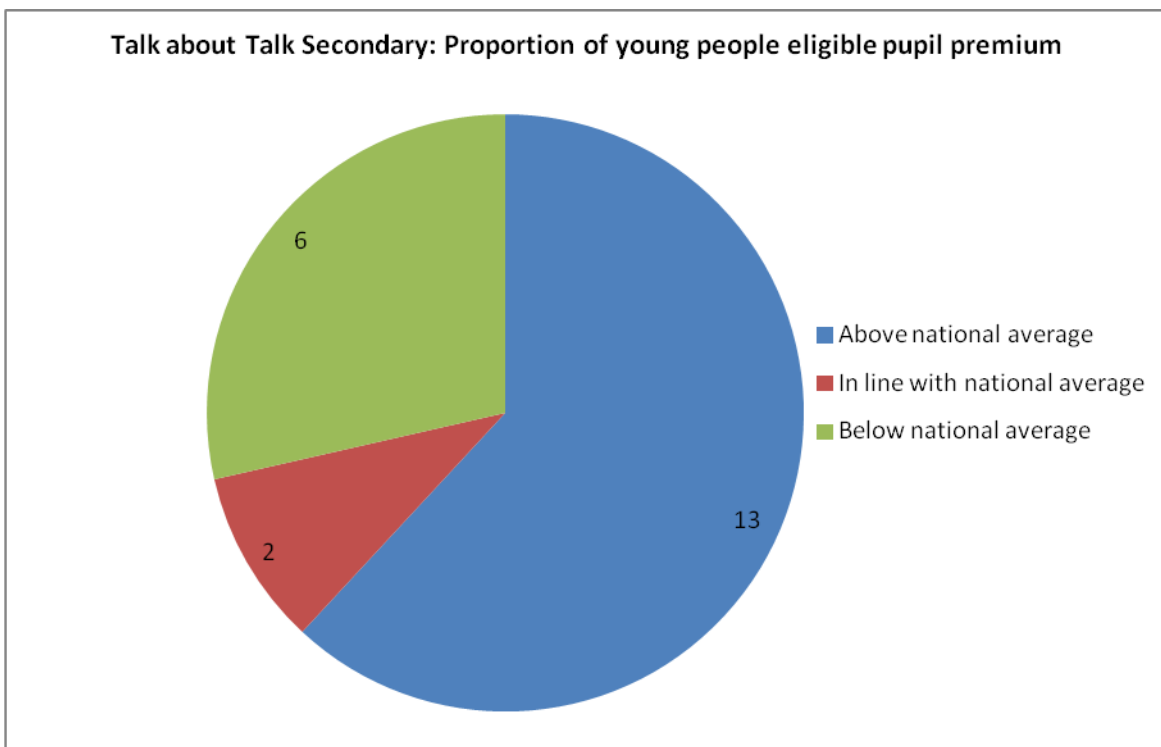


Figure 5: Proportion of young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities compared to the national average

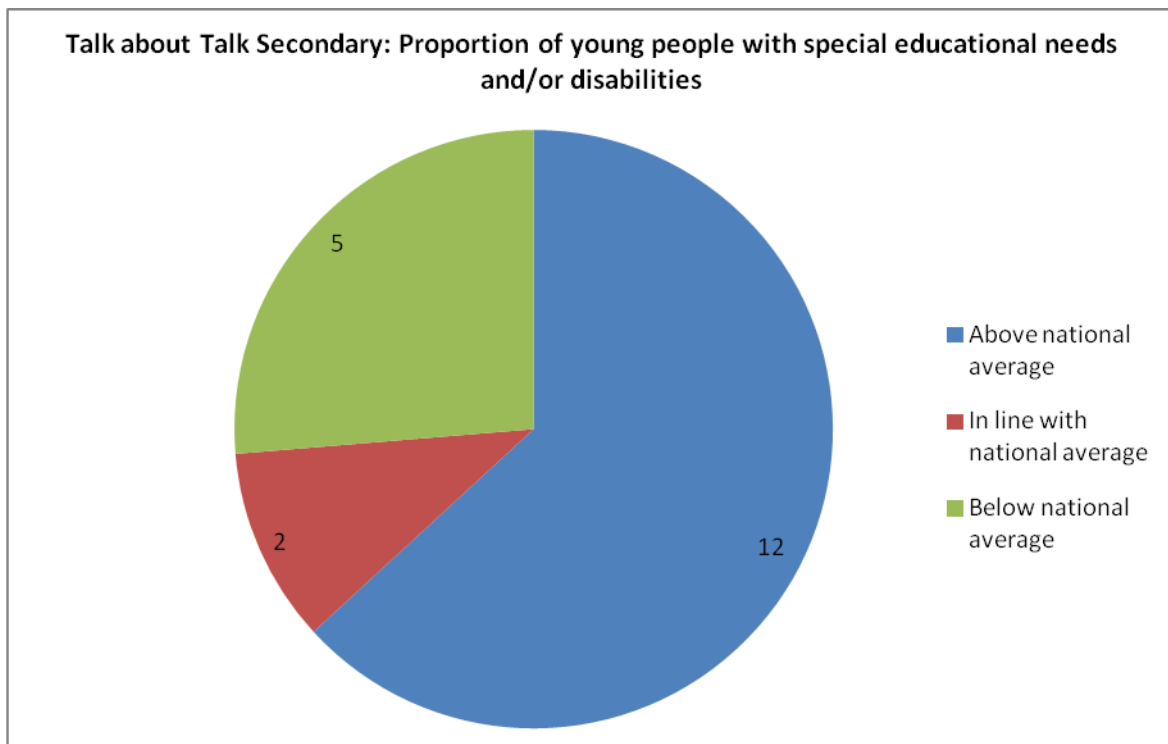


Figure 6: Proportion of young people learning English as an additional language compared to the national average

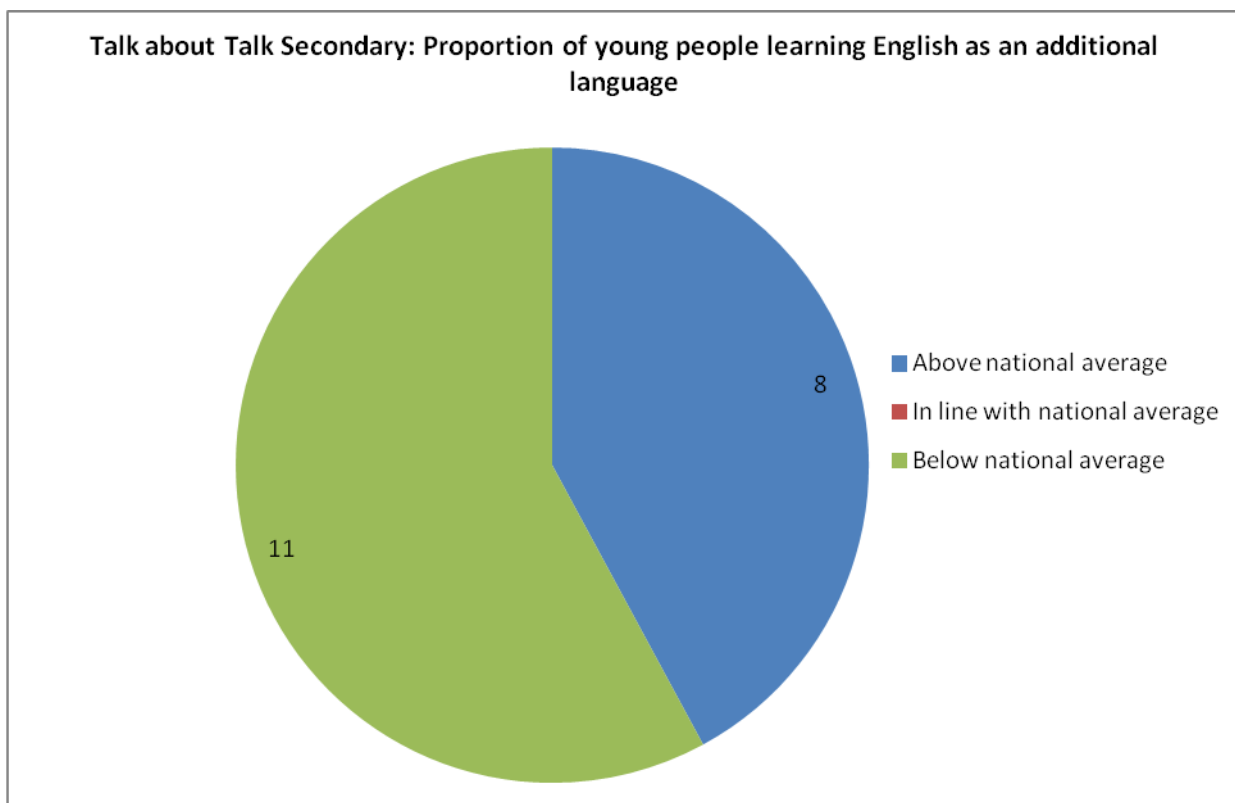
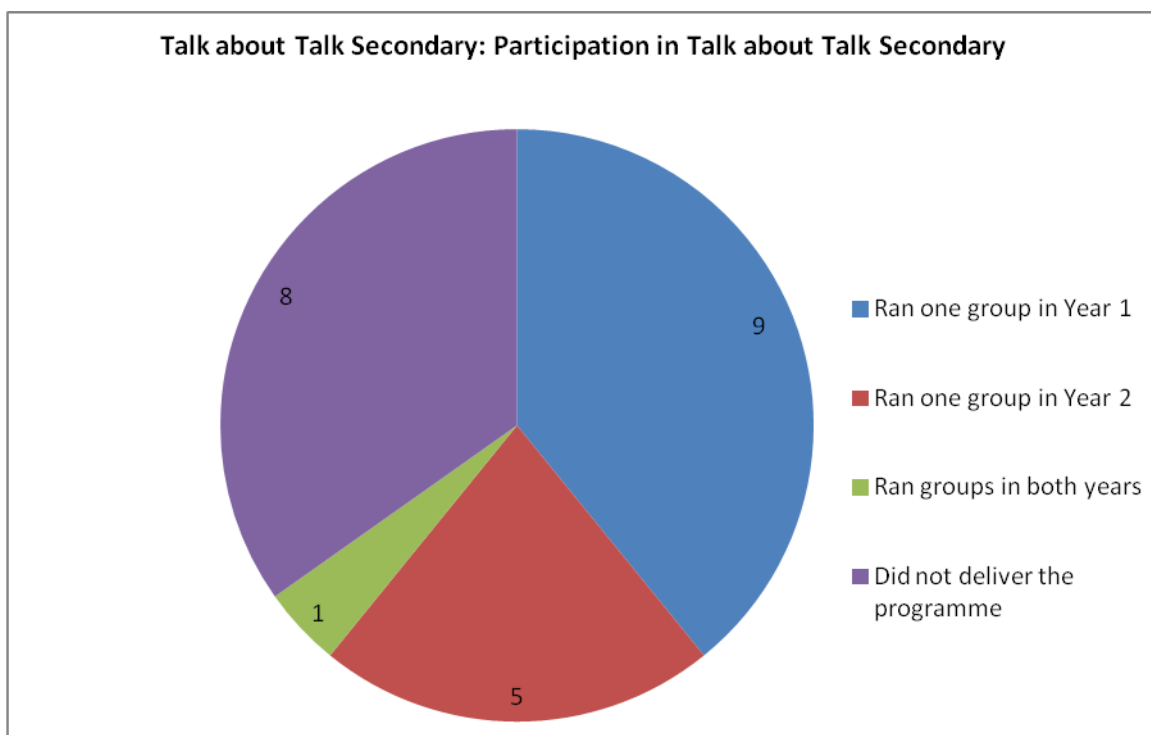


Figure 7: Graph to show if the school went on deliver Talk about Talk Secondary



The schools that participated in the comparison study are representative of the whole group in that they have a higher than average proportion of young people eligible for pupil premium and young people with SEND. However two out of the three schools had a higher than average proportion of young people with EAL where the group as a whole tended to have a lower than average proportion. A table of this information is presented in the appendices (Appendix 6).

5. Outcomes

5.1 Young people have improved communication skills.

Young people did have improved communication skills as a result of *Talk about Talk Secondary*. Across all 12 skills measured school staff felt young people found communication easier after participating in the programme. We collected 84 rating scales from school staff before *Talk about Talk Secondary* and 69 afterwards. The graph below shows the average rating of staff before (in blue) and after (in red) participating in the programme.

The average rating staff gave young people increased after *Talk about Talk Secondary*, the largest increase was in working in a team (average rating of 2.9 out of 5 before and 3.8 afterwards) and explaining things clearly (average rating of 2.3 before and 3.2 afterwards).

The results from the *Talk for Work* profile also show an improvement in young peoples' communication skills. We received:

- 24 before scores only
- 17 before and after scores
- 1 after score only

One school only completed the staff observation questions, not the whole profile, so these have been included in the analysis of the Staff Rating Scales.

Figure 8: Graph to show staff rating of young peoples' communication skills

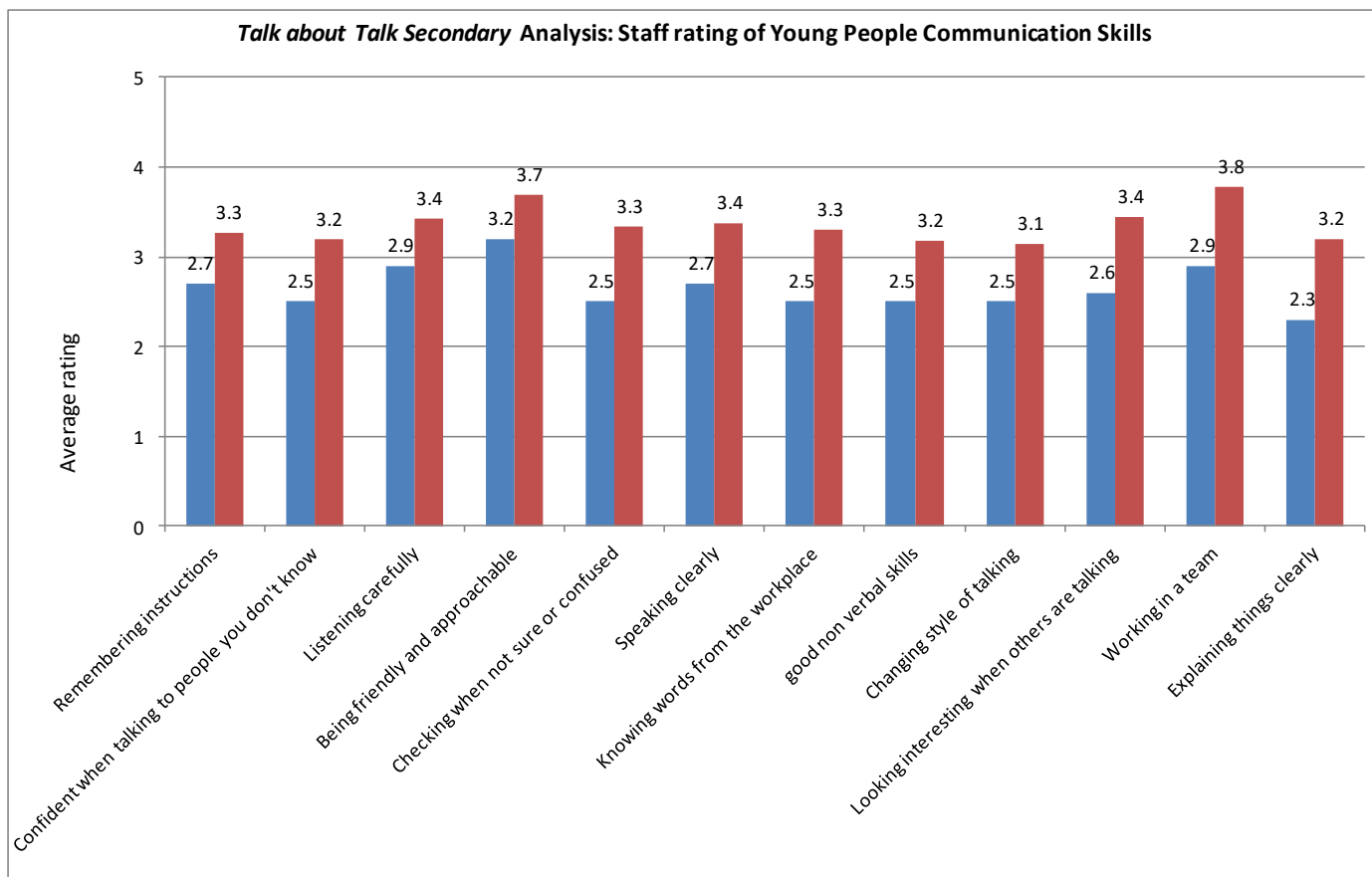
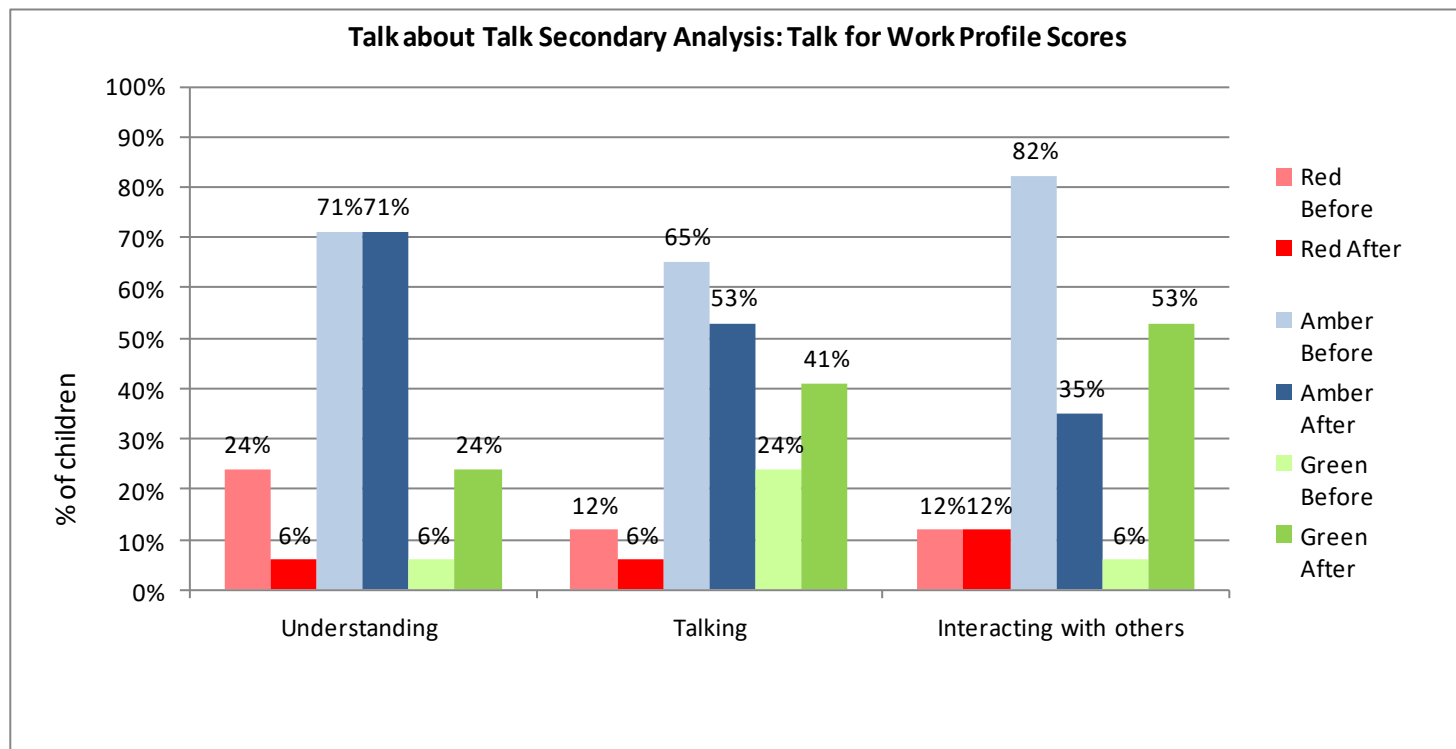


Figure 9: Graph to show percentage of young people getting red, amber and green scores using the Talk for Work profile



Analysis of the scores from 17 young people showed that an increased number of young people received green scores in all three sections, particularly ‘interacting with others’ (from 6% before programme to 53% following the programme). In the ‘understanding’ section nearly a quarter of young people moved into the green range however it should be noted that nearly a quarter were also starting with the red scores indicating they have more significant speech, language and communication needs. We would not expect those young peoples’ scores to move into the green range because of the severity of their speech, language and communication needs. *Talk about Talk Secondary* is designed for young people whose scores fall into the Amber range, but it has been interesting to see the more qualitative progress made by young people with more significant needs – see discussion section. T Tests showed that the average scores for each section of the *Talk for Work* profile increased significantly after *Talk about Talk Secondary*.

Table 3: Statistical Analysis of Talk for Work Profile Scores

| Average scores (out of 30) | | | |
|----------------------------|---------------|---------|-------------------------|
| | Understanding | Talking | Interacting with others |
| Before | 19.7 | 22.1 | 24.4 |
| After | 22.8 | 24.7 | 25.3 |
| Difference | 3.1 | 2.6 | 2.8 |
| T Test | P<0.05 | P<0.05 | P<0.05 |

From the interviews it was clear that both staff and young people could identify ways in which the young peoples’ skills had increased. We conducted three telephone interviews with staff, three were interviewed as a focus group and two staff members submitted email feedback. They particularly noted how young people worked better in a team, had clearer speech and demonstrated better listening

Ability to adapt language to suit context, more self aware, presentation skills (SLT, School 16)

I think that they've learned to listen to each other when they are working in a group, they are better at that and they're better at supporting each other as a team (TA, School 18).

They also commented on the improvements to the young peoples’ presentation skills for example they were more confident about taking part, felt able to go ‘off script’ and ad-lib with the audience and used more appropriate body language

They were able to talk unscripted and prompted with the visitors that we have local Rotary club (TA, School 18)

I think from the point of view of thinking about their vocabulary, body language and their facial expressions they are much more aware now (SLT, School 22).

Not only did the staff see improvements in the young people’s skills but it was noted that these skills had been transferred from the *Talk about Talk Secondary* group into other environments such as in the classroom and on work experience

They have definitely got more confident in presenting things they've had to do a speaking and listening assignment just recently and all of them said how much easier it was to stand up and do that (TA, School 23)

Very positive reports from recent work experience (SLT, School 16)

Those students who have gone on to deliver the workshops have done really well and most importantly we have seen an improvement in how they communicate with both staff and peers (Head of Destinations and Enrichment, School 19)

Young people were also able to identify where the programme had impacted on their communication skills including having more control over their body language, talking to new people and being able to re-word a sentence

I have definitely improved. I can even speak in front of others more confidently whereas before I would do anything to avoid it (Young Person, School 19)

First I was shy before but now I've become very happy so I'm just talking. Before I was stammering but now I'm a lot better (Young Person, School 16)

I might be able to listen better in class because listening is a struggle for me in class (Young Person, School 23)

The small-scale comparison study also showed an improvement in young peoples' communication skills. 41 young people were assessed before *Talk about Talk Secondary* and 30 were assessed afterwards – one of whom only partially completed the assessment. Independent sample T Tests showed that *Talk about Talk Secondary* group made improvements to their communication skills where the control group did not. The group that had taken part in the programme demonstrated significantly better skills in checking when confused, changing their style of talking, listening, being friendly and approachable, showing good non verbal skills, looking interested and being confident talking to others.

There were no significant differences between the two groups for the Speaking Task and confidence rating scale. The reasons for this are explored in the discussion section.

Table 4: Analysis of Comparison Study Scores

| | | Average Score out of 12 | Average Verbal rating | Average Non verbal rating | Confidence rating total (verbal+Non) |
|---------------------------------|--------|-------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Talk about Talk Secondary Group | Before | 5.9 | 3.6 | 3.5 | 7.1 |
| | After | 6.4 | 3.8 | 3.7 | 7.5 |
| Control Group | Before | 5.5 | 3.5 | 3.3 | 6.8 |
| | After | 6.5 | 3.6 | 3.6 | 7.2 |

5.2 Young people have improved awareness of their own communication strengths and difficulties and the importance of effective communication in the workplace

Analysis of student self-rating scales and focus groups showed that the young people were more aware of the importance of good communication skills not only for the workplace but also the classroom. They could also more accurately identify their communication strengths and difficulties.

Before participating in *Talk about Talk Secondary* young people could over estimate their skills:

We had one young man who didn't really engage...who rated himself as excellent in everything but that is what he does in everything. He is really poor in being aware of his own skills and abilities and he is possibly got the greatest needs within the group (Speech and Language Therapist (SLT), School 22).

We collected 118 student rating scales before *Talk about Talk Secondary* and 108 after. These scales were compared with the staff rating scales (n=84 before and n= 69 after). Before the programme young people rated their own skills higher than staff did. Statistical analysis showed that in some cases these differences were statistically significant. After taking part in *Talk about Talk Secondary* the difference between staff and young people ratings had decreased and none were statistically significant. In effect, staff and young people ratings became more similar, with staff giving young people higher ratings, and, in some cases, young people lowering their own self-rating. One explanation of the decrease in some of the young people ratings is that as a result of the programme, students became more aware of the difficulties they had with communication.

This could result in young people feeling less confident and this had to be managed by the staff supporting them

They are a bit more self-aware, interestingly for one of them that had a bit of a negative impact on her only because she's more aware of her shortcomings but we are going to address that because I'm going to take her on a one-to-one basis when we finished this programme (Teaching Assistant (TA), School 23)

So self-esteem... We had to be very careful throughout the whole programme about the impact on them themselves (the students) (SLT, School 20)

However the focus groups we conducted (ten young people across three focus groups plus written feedback from another 11) demonstrated that young people could also identify that this increased understanding could benefit them in school and in work related activities such as interviews

Student: Because I think that I'll probably do well in interviews as well

Interviewer: You think it will help you in interviews?

Student: Yeah I mean I know it's a long way away for me but it is good that we are preparing the skills (Young person, School 16)

I think the soft skills; if I am after a job that is critical to have (Young Person, School 20)

They could see that reflecting on their communication skills could help them improve those skills

You kind of learn from it when you've been rated like that and you think "okay I can do this better" (Young Person, School 16)

Also by how you can get better at doing a skill and not backing down (Young Person, School 18)

After the programme young people not only understood their own communication strengths and difficulties but also the nature of communication difficulties more generally

It felt good because you're teaching them something that they don't know and you kind of teaching yourself at the same time because we didn't know about the communication chain and now we've learned a lot about

what it is so now we're aware of it so if we met anyone who has a communication problems we can communicate better (Young Person, School 16)

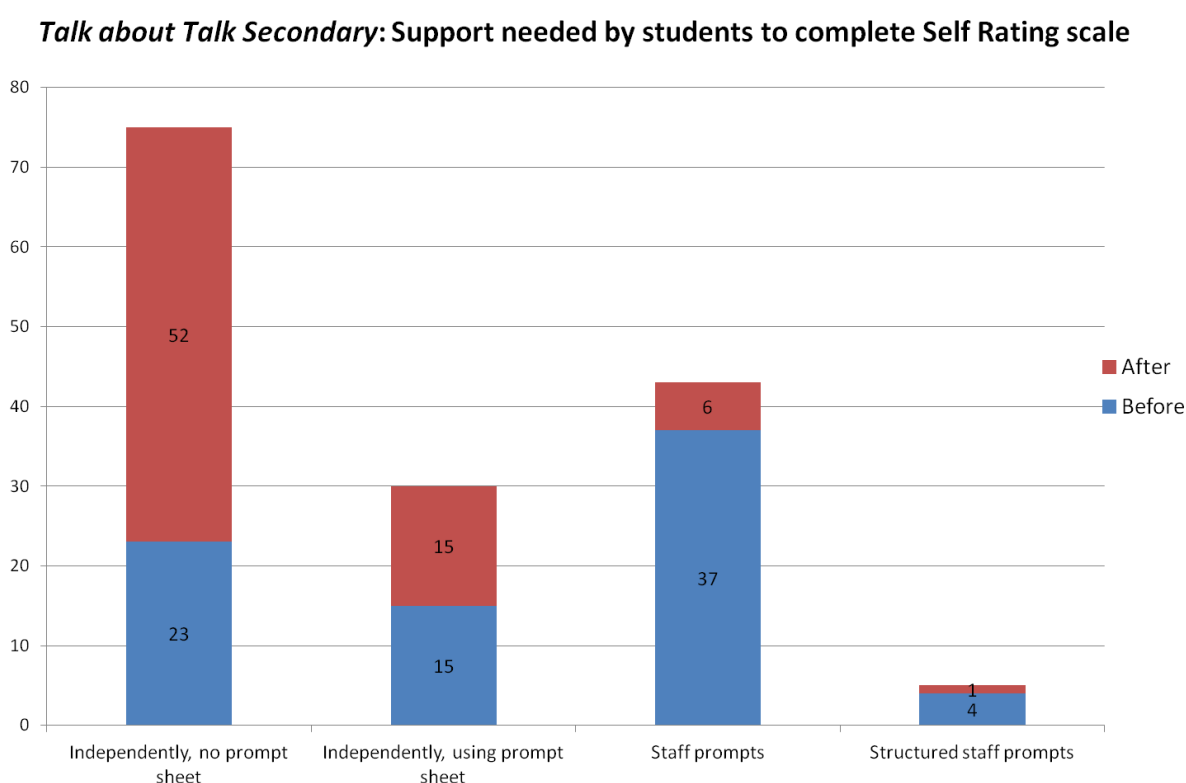
There are a lot more communication difficulties that I thought there were (Young Person, School 20)

The importance of students being able to reflect on their skills was not only identified as being important by the young people but also by the staff

Supporting pupils to reflect more. More confident supporting pupils to talk about their own difficulties as a positive way of developing awareness of what helps them (SLT, School 16)

As well as having more awareness about their strengths and difficulties young people were also more able to make those assessments independently. The graph below shows the amount of support the young people needed to complete the self rating scale before and after *Talk about Talk Secondary*

Figure 10: Graph to show support young people needed to complete Self Rating Scale



5.3 Schools are more able to improve the communication skills of young people, including those with SEN and SLCN, to prepare them for work.

Staff confidence increased after delivering *Talk about Talk Secondary* across all four competencies. We collected 60 'before' ratings from 16 schools and 15 'after' ratings from 7 schools

The two graphs below show average ratings of staff confidence. The largest increase in confidence related to using activities to support social communication. This suggests that *Talk about Talk Secondary* gave staff practical activities to use when supporting young people. Frequency tables show that after *Talk about Talk Secondary* none of the staff report being 'not confident' in the understanding the difference between receptive and expressive language. As

well as this, no staff felt under-confident in altering their own language to meet the needs of young people with SLCN (67% described themselves as very confident in this). 80% of staff were very confident in understanding why SLCN affects behaviour (compared with 23% before) and 73% confident in understanding why SLCN may affect emotional development (compared with 22% before). This is also backed up in the staff interviews where staff were able to identify changes to their own, or colleagues', practice

I think being more aware of how communication works ...guides... when we try to unpick needs or unpick the reasons why there are behaviours. It has actually given us more confidence in dealing with that because rather than just seeing the behaviour, understanding that the behaviour is communicating something to you that there may be a problem in any of those areas of communication (TA, School 18)

In terms of how I've changed my own practice I think it's having that knowledge of how communication works that has helped me to actually decode especially with behaviour students (TA, School 18)

Staff could also identify strategies they developed when supporting young people such as giving information in the correct order and pausing after speaking. This awareness of strategies meant that staff were less reliant on the SEN Department:

Staff are now able to identify students with C and I (communication and Interaction) in their classrooms, they are testing out strategies and less reliant on support from the SEN department (Assistant SENCo, School 2)

As well as changes to practice staff felt more knowledgeable as a result of delivering *Talk about Talk Secondary*:

I've learnt a lot from it and personally I would say that the staff who have worked with me on it, in the feedback I've had from them is that they learnt a lot about speech, language and communication and how it works and how it can work in teenagers as well (TA, School 18)

When asked if they enjoyed delivering the programme staff were very positive. Describing it as

A massive success for both teachers and students (Key Stage 4 English Leader & Literacy Co-ordinator, School 19)

Honestly it has been one of the best things we have done with our students (Head of Destinations and Enrichment, School 19)

Figure 11: Graph to show average staff confidence rating across Competency 1 and 2

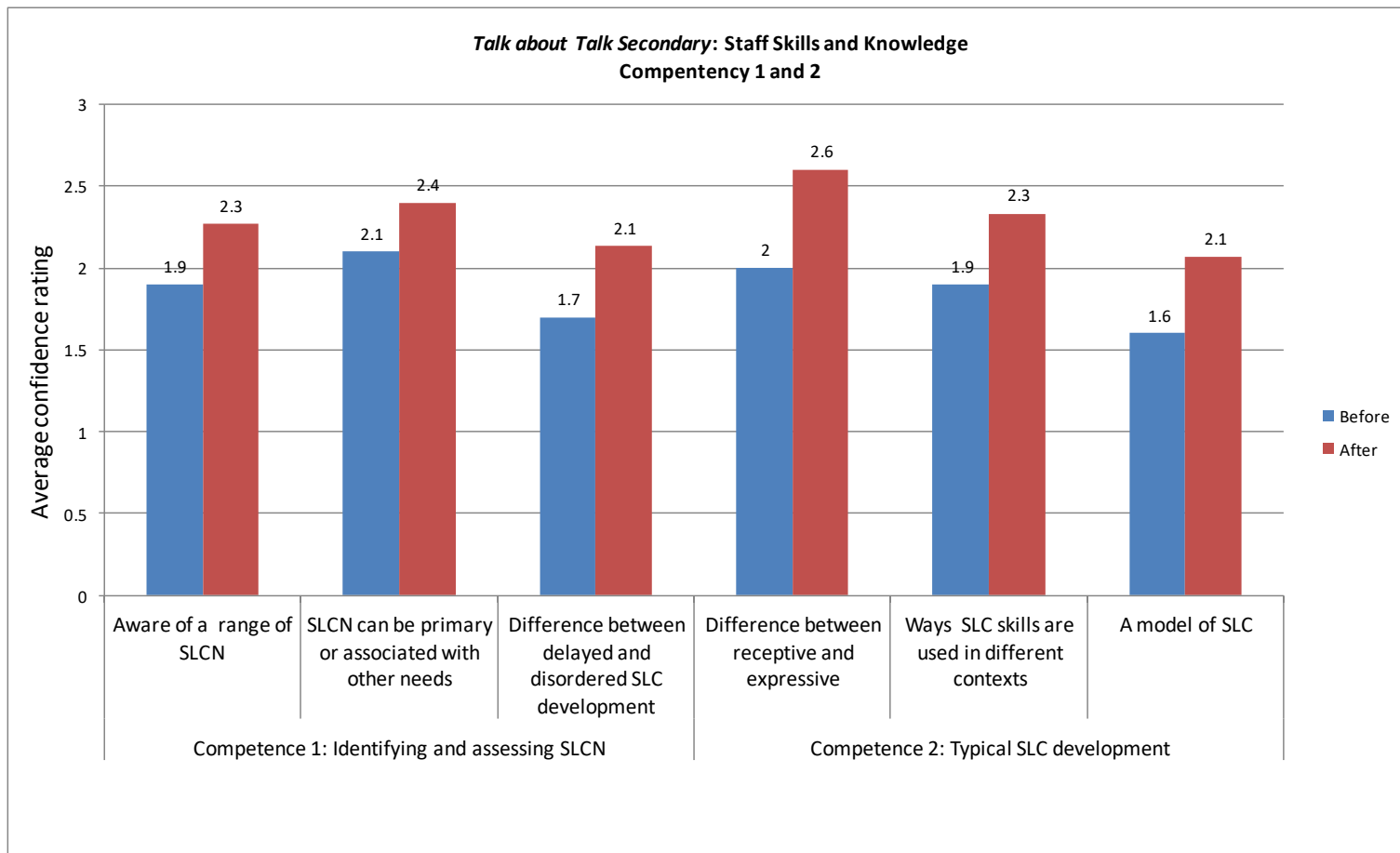
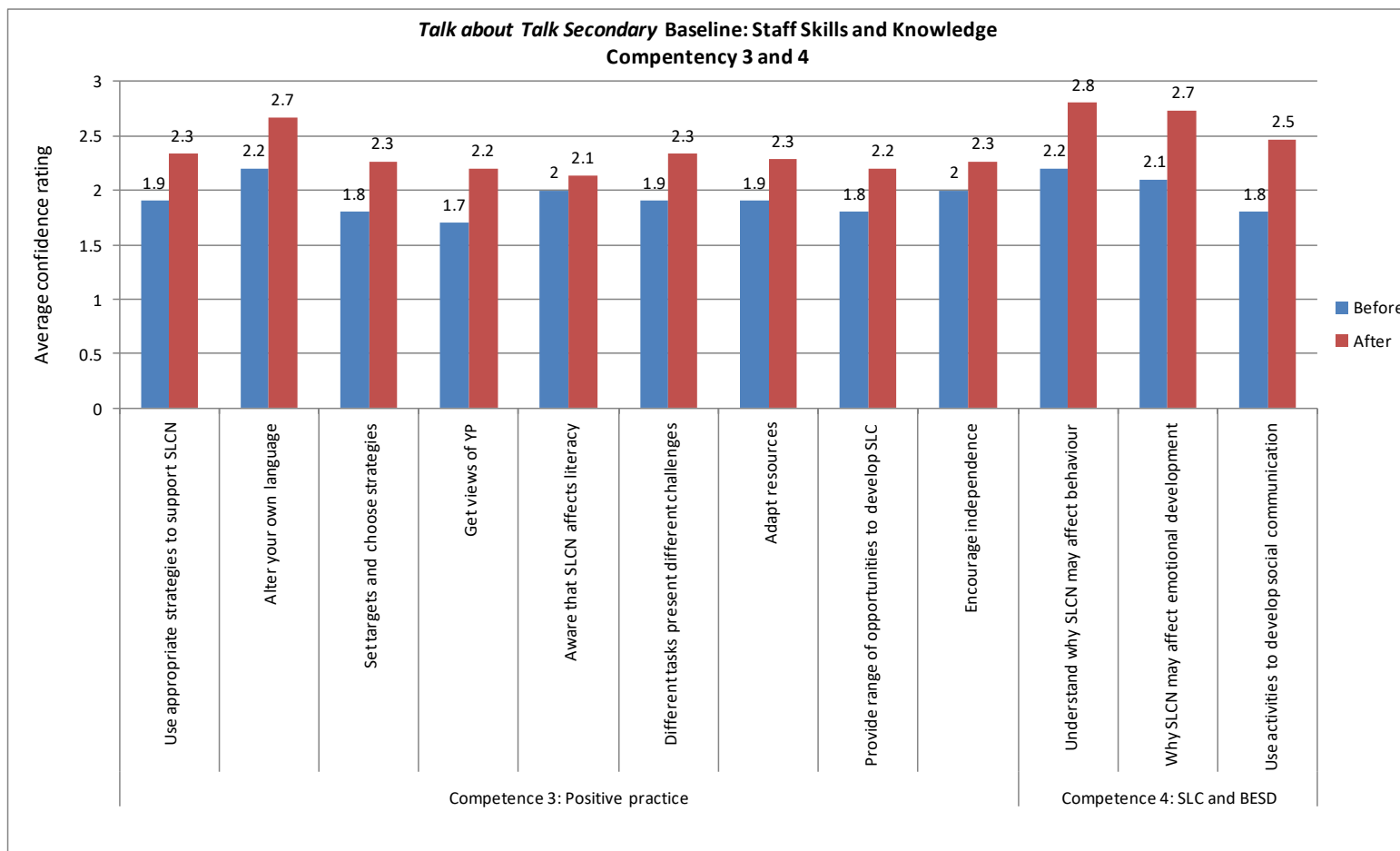


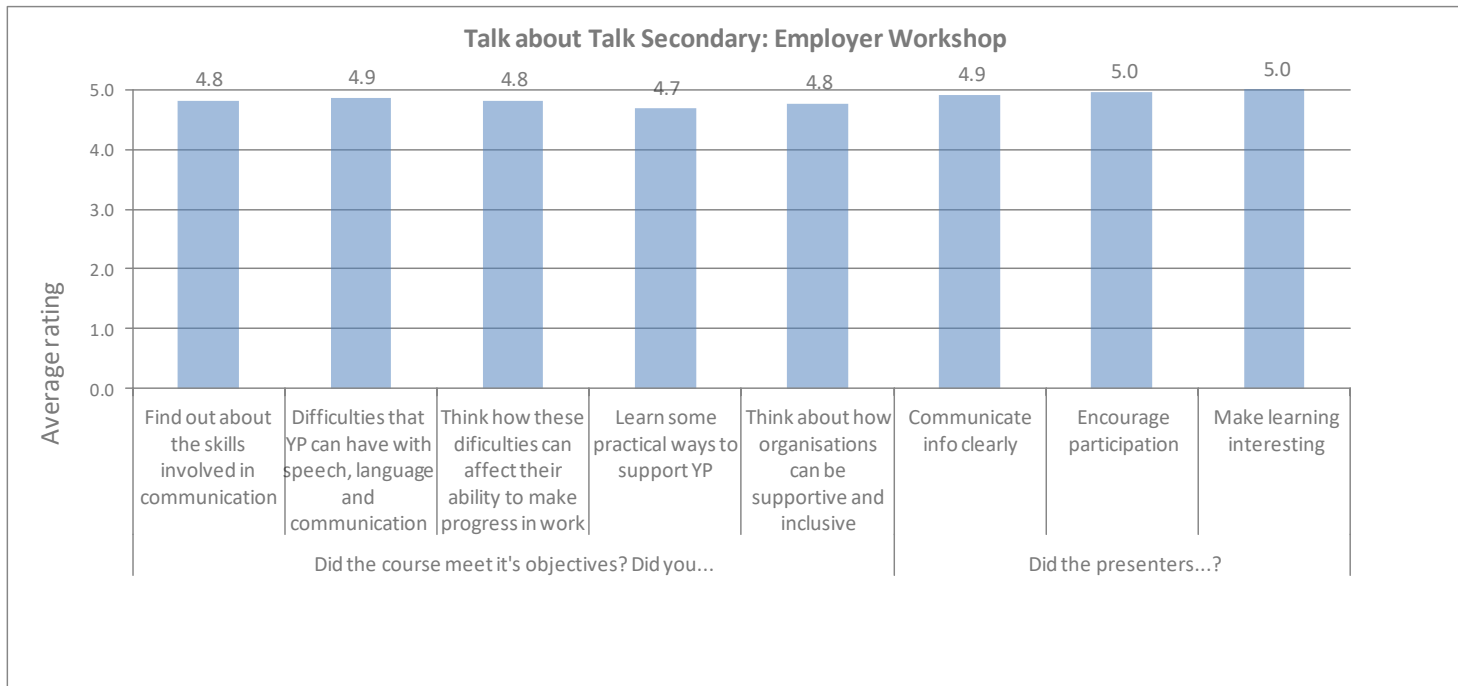
Figure 12: Graph to show average staff confidence rating across Competency 3 and 4



5.4 Employers and employees have improved awareness of the nature and prevalence of communication difficulties and how to support people with these difficulties.

We gathered evaluation forms from 22 employers who attended the Employers Workshop. The feedback about the workshop was overwhelmingly positive. The graph below shows the average rating of employers who attended the course where 1 was 'not at all' and 5 was 'completely'

Figure 13: Graph to show average employer evaluation ratings after the Employer Workshop



All of the employers reported that the presenters encouraged participation and made learning interesting (by rating these questions a 5).

Employers were also asked how they would change their practice as a result of attending the workshop. 19 employers answered this question and their responses have been themed in the table below

Table 5: Changes to practice after attending the Employer Workshop

| Increased knowledge/awareness | Environment | Pauses | Clearer instructions | Be mindful of communication needs | Sharing information with others | No changes |
|-------------------------------|-------------|--------|----------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------|
| 6 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 |

Most participants felt it had given them new knowledge that would increase their awareness when interacting with young people. Some people identified changes they would make to their practice such as giving clearer instructions, pausing more and taking an audit of their environment.

Employers were also invited to make further comments. Here employers expressed their satisfaction with the day:

This is such an important programme to best inform employers of the challenges young people face with communication challenges.

An excellent, well constructed and really informative session. Lots of fast paced interactive activities. Challenging but presented in a non intimidating way. Students' involvement brought it all to life and their involvement in the case study activity was really insightful.

Very interesting, making you think of things you take for granted.

After attending the workshop schools were asked to share employer contact details so that employers could be invited to participate in a telephone interview. However some schools had not yet delivered the workshop to an external audience, only school staff, so sent contact details for colleagues instead. We had two telephone interviews with employers and received written feedback from 2 school staff that attended the workshops but did not deliver the programme.

This small sample size makes it difficult to draw conclusions about impact of the programme on employers. Although they were very complimentary about the workshop, young peoples' involvement and the quality of the presentation they struggled to link the information to their work. One employer felt that because they work with a lot of people who have English as an additional language they implemented a lot of the strategies suggested in the workshop anyway. However they did observe changes in the young people throughout the course of the workshop

This young chap was very nervous at the start, introvert and how we sort of blossomed throughout (Viking Recruitment)

The other employer felt it had widened her knowledge and how she thought about communication but had not had an impact on practice. However she did intend to feedback information from the workshop to her colleagues in their management meeting.

6. Discussion and conclusions

The results suggest that the *Talk about Talk Secondary* programme led to improvements in *team working* (statistically significant for the whole cohort of young people taking part in the programme) and in *checking when confused, changing their style of talking, listening* (statistically significant for a small sample of young people, and not seen in a matched comparison group). These are all skills that are valued by employers (I CAN employer survey), and so this indicates that *Talk about Talk Secondary* helps to prepare young people for the world of work. Further evaluation would confirm this, for example by following up young people into employment or work experience, or investigating in more depth employers' ability to support young people in the workplace.

Gathering evidence from a range of different sources has provided rich impact data. Analysis of quantitative data indicates progress following *Talk about Talk Secondary* and the qualitative data collected through focus groups and interviews helps to understand the impact of the programme for young people, school staff and employers. Qualitative data also examined the process of change associated with the programme: young people and staff both expressed how *Talk about Talk Secondary* had an impact on the young people's communication skills.

The qualitative data is particularly vital for young people whose SLCN are identified as a special educational need (SEN). Progress for these young people is unlikely to be shown on the measures used given the long-term, pervasive nature of language disorder. However, the progress and reflections reported by students themselves in focus groups, and through staff interviews shows the value of the programme for students with more severe SLCN.

Some of the most pleasing impacts relate less to the development of actual communication skills, and more to young peoples' awareness of and ability to make judgements about their own strengths and difficulties. This 'meta-linguistic' ability (the ability to reflect on and accurately judge their own communication skills) is critical to them

being able to make progress in their communication (Hartshorne 2012). Without the ability to recognise the importance of communication, or knowledge that it is something that can be improved, there is little reason or impetus to change.

Developing and trialling tools for evaluating young peoples' communication has been fascinating. Traditional, standardised speech and language assessments are designed to assess component language skills such as vocabulary, grammatical understanding, and narrative skills. In adolescence, standardised assessments may not be appropriate for measuring specific change related to interventions and support– they can be susceptible to bias (Spencer et al 2012), and are often not sensitive enough to pick up changes following intervention in adolescents' language and communication (Lesaux 2010, Spencer et al 2012). Critically, they provide limited information about the strategies pupils use (Murphy et al 2016), about functional communication or competence in real life contexts (Maxwell et al 2015).

In this evaluation, there was opportunity to design and trial assessment tasks which captured the reciprocal nature of communication. Some tasks were more successful than others. A speaking and listening tasks did not reflect the progress made in young peoples' communication that was reported by staff and the young people themselves. This may have been due to the measure used which did not fully test the skills addressed through the programme, nor did it reflect the dynamic nature of real communication. A tool designed to look at communication in relation to confidence showed potential, and there is room for this to be modified and piloted more widely. Similarly, the *Talk for Work profile* provided rich data, and staff in schools reported that it mirrored the students' strengths and difficulties providing them with useful additional information not yielded by other assessment routes. This tool was trialled with only a small sample of young people, and such promising initial results provide the impetus for a larger pilot and validation exercise. The fact that it includes a section where staff rate student's communication skills based on their own observations in a number of settings has proved to be essential. Students' functional communication skills are difficult to capture in a one-off assessment.

This evaluation shows positive changes to staff confidence as a result of the programme. The combination of an initial short training session and being actively involved in delivering an intervention is shown to really boost staff confidence. This is an important finding in the context of recent Communication Trust workforce report, where levels of confidence in secondary school staff were reported to be low. This same report also highlighted the lack of professional development opportunities for this group of professionals. The programme presents an effective, practical route to skill development.

I CAN did not work directly with employers during the project and as a result found it challenging to collect data from schools that showed impact of *Talk about Talk Secondary* on employers' practice. The data we collected demonstrated an increase in employer knowledge of SLCN but did not show they applied this to their practice. However we would be interested in working with employers in the future to explore this further.

In conclusion, *Talk about Talk Secondary* – an intervention involving 12 hour-long lessons – has been shown to have an impact on young people's functional communication skills, making them more ready for the workplace and improving their self awareness. The intervention and accompanying training also acts as an effective route to staff development, helping teachers and assistants to support adolescents' communication skills, to identify those with difficulties and to monitor progress.

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Maxine Burns, Talk about Talk Secondary Project manager, I CAN Speech and Language Advisor

Mary Hartshorne, I CAN Head of Evidence

In collaboration with Dr Sarah Spencer, University of Sheffield

Appendices

Appendix 1: Theory of Change

| Inputs | Outputs | Outcomes | Impact |
|---|--|---|--|
| <p>Staff time, professional expertise</p> <p>Academic support</p> | <p><i>Staff training programme –</i></p> <p><i>Mentoring programme for young people</i></p> <p>Workshops for employers.</p> <p>Monitoring tools for YP and for schools</p> | <p>Young people with better communication skills</p> <p>School staff know more about SLC/N</p> <p>School staff know more about how to support communication difficulties in YP</p> <p>Employer organisations have more understanding of YP’s communication difficulties and introduce strategies to support</p> | <p>Young people more employable</p> <p>Better links between schools and employer organisations</p> |

Appendix 2: Talk about Talk Secondary Selection criteria for students

This programme will support students with a range of different types and level of communication difficulty, some of which had been previously unidentified.

For the purposes of this pilot, we are focusing on two main types of student: young people with ‘poor’ or immature language and young people with identified speech, language and communication need.

The training provided by I CAN will build on staff confidence and ability to select those young people who might benefit most from the programme, but as an initial guide, the following information may be helpful for lead staff.

| Type of student | May look like (broad guidelines). We will provide support to help you identify these students | Inclusion in the programme may help them to... |
|---|---|---|
| Students with immature or poor language skills. These students’ language skills may not have been formally assessed but staff may have general concerns about their progress. They are unlikely to be on the school’s SEN register. | Mid ability / mid set student lacking ability to express ideas clearly | ...practice giving ideas in smaller group, thereby gaining confidence in a larger group |
| | Student struggling with academic aspects but shows aptitude with practical aspects | ...consider which language and/or communication skills they need to focus on to make the most of their practical aptitudes in the work arena |
| | Student whose behaviour / disengagement puts him at risk of exclusion | ...understand some of their own communication difficulties, perhaps around the area of language register |
| | Student who appears very quiet and lacking in confidence generally | ...develop confidence through practise in specific communication skills |
| Students with identified speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) | May have a statement/EHCP identifying SLCN | ...access targeted support towards achieving set objectives |
| | May have been previously known to SLT service but not eligible for targeted support | ...develop greater competence in a range of communication skills previously identified as challenging |
| | May have another identified condition such as ASD, ADHD, SpLD where SLCN are a feature | ...develop greater competence in specific language and communication skills they find difficult |
| | May be on school’s SEN register and considered to have generalised learning difficulties | ...have opportunities to practise a range of activities, gaining confidence, self-esteem and employability skills from working towards achievable tasks |

Appendix 3: Case Study of School Attrition

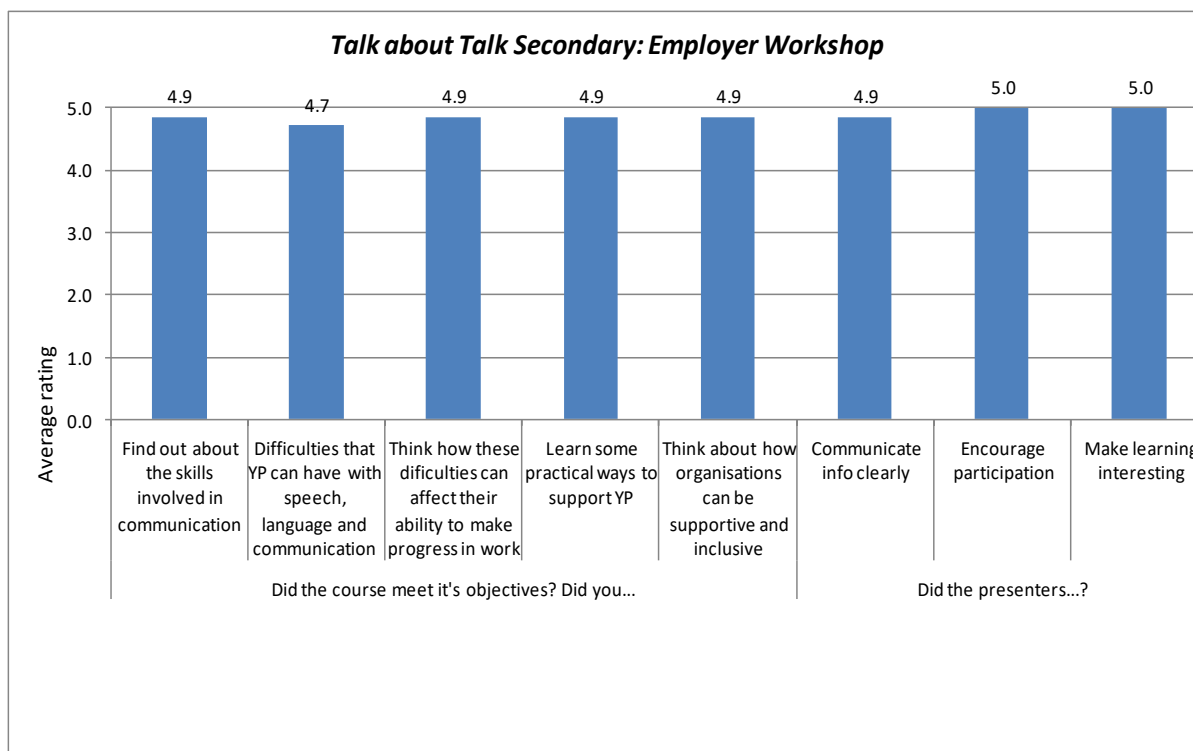
As we have described in the report, we have experienced a level of attrition from the pilot that was not expected. We feel the reasons for this are complex and multi-faceted and have included a 'case study' here to illustrate that although some schools have had to drop out, the impact of the programme in many of these has been good.

School 15 began the programme by inducting four members of staff, three Teaching Assistants (TA) and 1 one Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA). Eight students from across years 10 and 11 were referred by school staff to and then self selected to join the student induction session after being told more about the programme by staff who had been trained.

Due to a variety of challenges with student engagement and release from lessons, five students went forward from the original group of 8 to develop the employer workshop.

Despite a struggle to get local employers engaged in this very rural area, an employer workshop was presented to 8 participants and feedback was excellent.

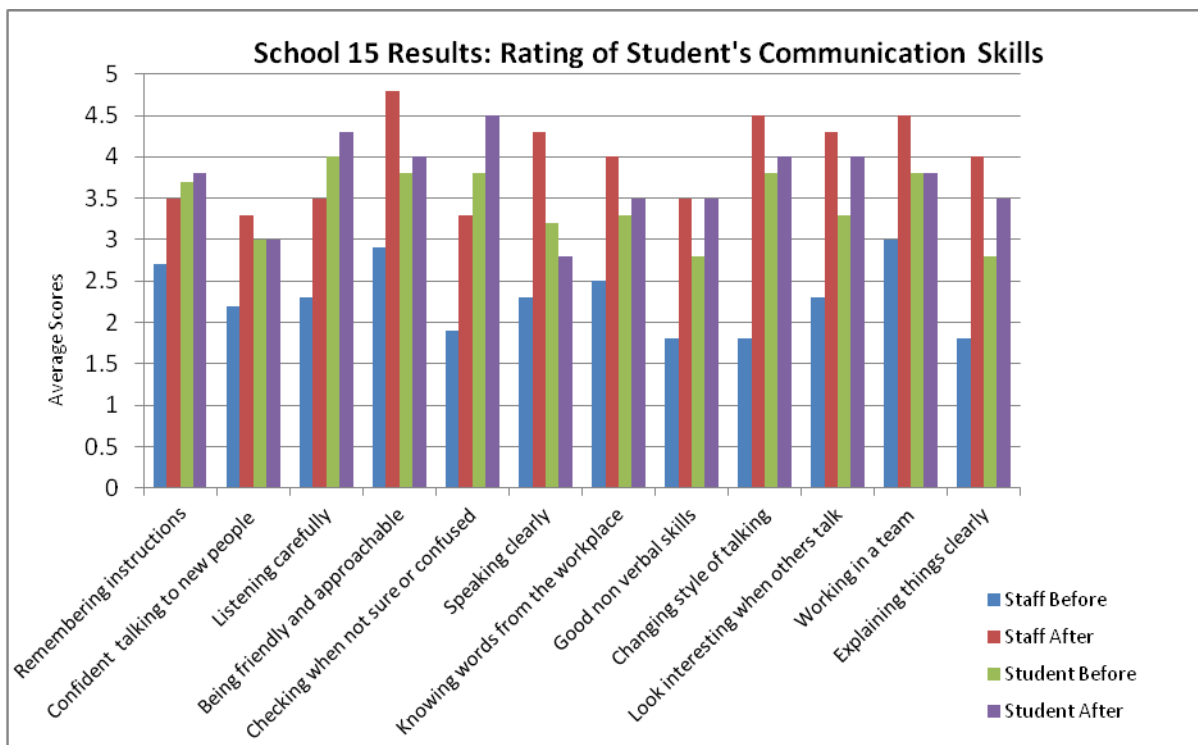
After the *Employers Workshop* employers were asked to complete an Evaluation Form. They were asked to rate the workshop on a scale of 1(not at all) to 5 (yes completely). The graph below shows the average responses from the employers who attended the workshop and completed evaluation forms (n=7)



Additional comments from participants included:

- Would love more people to have experienced this! Definitely bridges a gap between schools and businesses
- We employ apprentices at central office and the info presented today would be v useful when considering applications.
- This is such an important programme to best inform employers of the challenges young people face with communication challenges.
- It's brilliant to have young people themselves running the course as it clearly helps to understand their own communication difficulties and give them confidence to overcome issues and build confidence

Outcomes for students and school staff were judged to be very good also. The graphs below show how the staff and students rated the students' communication skills on a scale of 1 (always difficult) to 5 (always easy). The first graph shows the average scores for the whole group.



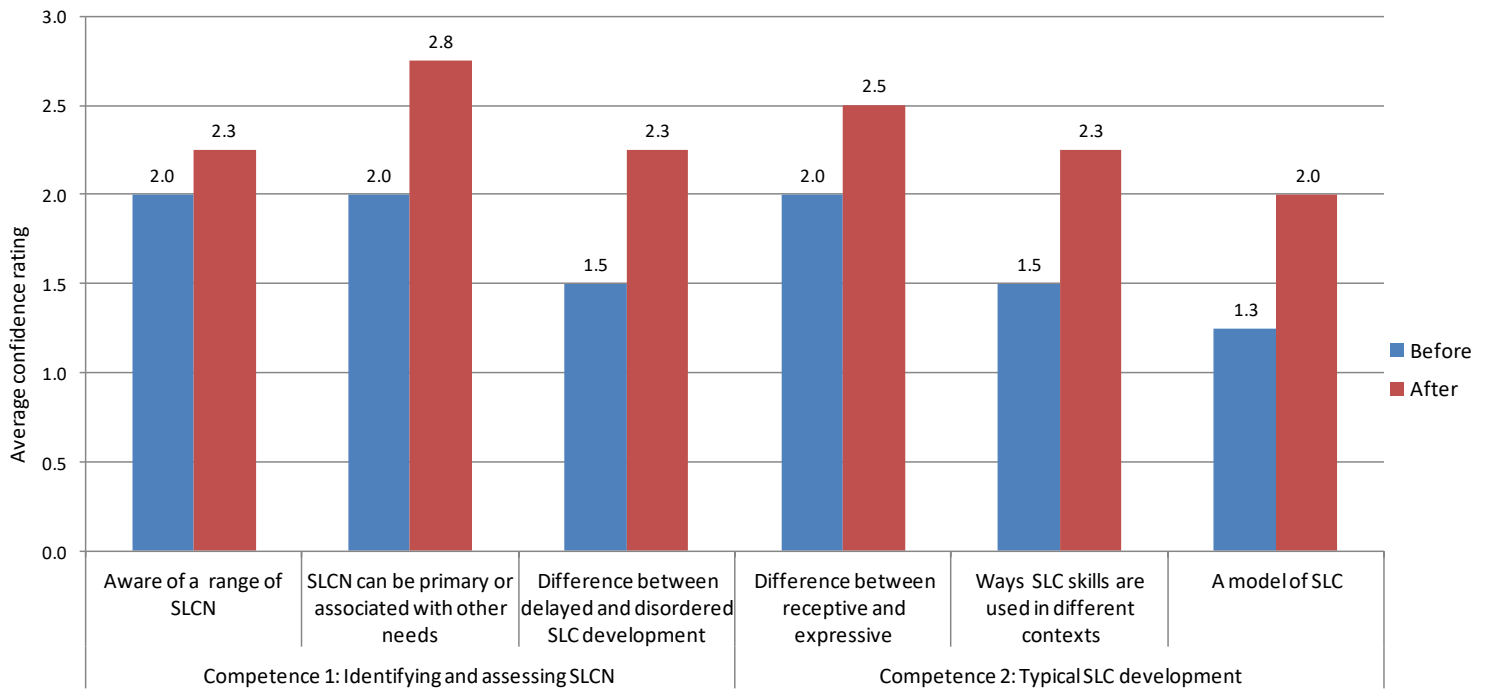
Students all varied in the amount and range of progress they made. Some were noted to have started to transfer the changes they had developed during the course into the classroom:

“D’s confidence seems to have improved greatly, he is asking and answering more questions in class. It’s lovely to hear D’s voice!”

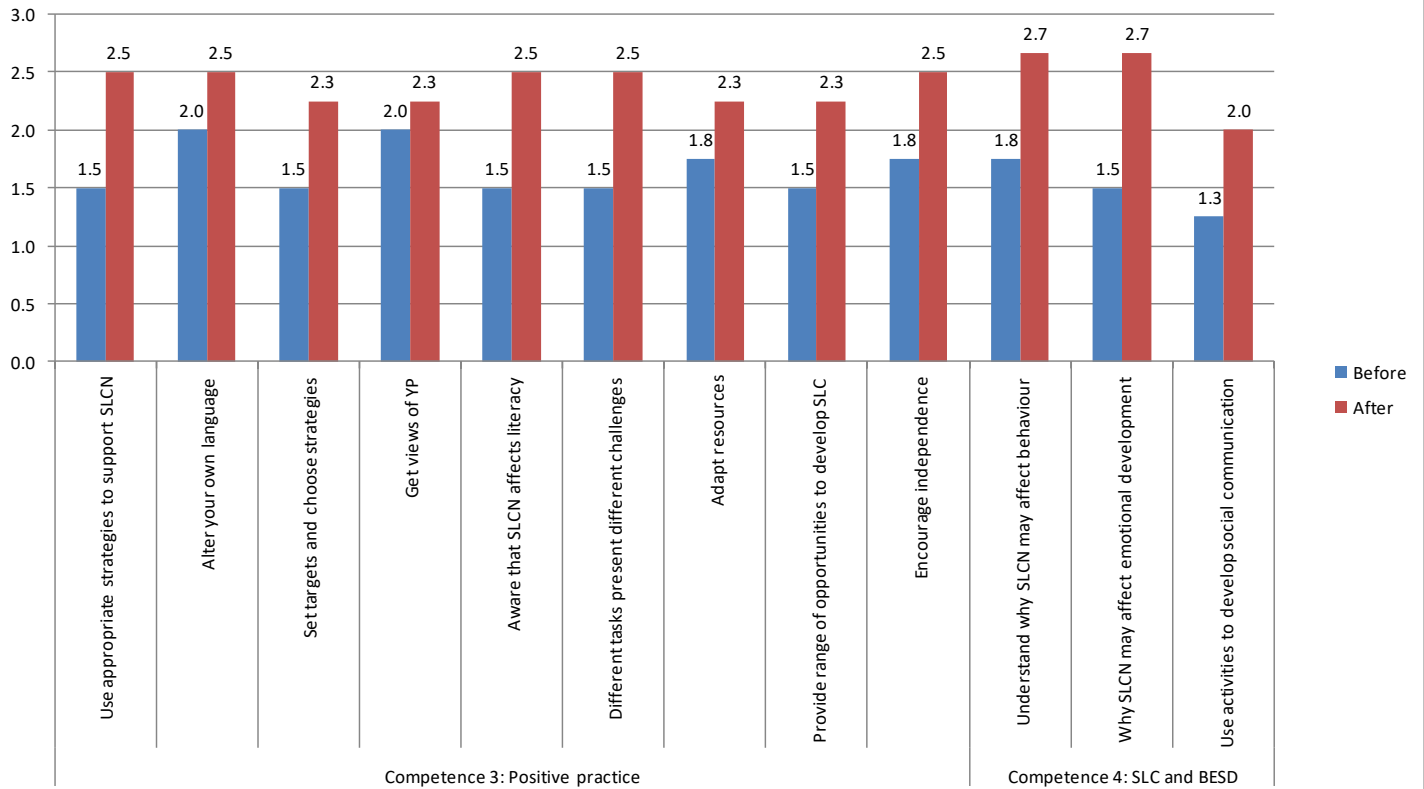
“R has truly blossomed over the course and I hope her confidence continues.”

Staff competence and confidence with regards to understanding and supporting a range of SLCN also showed progress during the programme. The graphs below show the staff ratings of their own skills and knowledge on a scale of 1 (not very confident) to 3 (very confident).

**School 15 Results: Staff Skills and Knowledge
Competency 1 and 2**



**School 15 Results: Staff Skills and Knowledge
Competency 3 and 4**



However, despite very positive experiences and evidence of improvement in student communication skills, and staff competence in identifying and supporting these, the school did not have the resources to continue with the programme. This is demonstrated in an email sent by a school staff member

I'm really sorry that I haven't got back to you but we are very understaffed at the moment and it is extremely difficult to just maintain our support for students. Therefore we are not in a position to continue this year but will try to include resources that you have sent and maintain what has already been developed by the Team members.

Thank you so much for your input into the school - it has been a valuable asset to our Team and the students.

Appendix 4: Summary of school demographics

| School and location | Type | Size (compared to average) | No. of young people receiving Pupil premium compared to average | No. of young people with identified SEND compared to average | No. of young people learning English as an additional language compared to average | Did this school complete Talk about Talk Secondary? |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|---|---|---|
| School 1 Basingstoke | Secondary | Smaller | Above | Above | Below | Year 1 |
| School 2 Banbury | Academy Sponsor led | Average | Above | Above | Below | Year 1 |
| School 3 Coventry | Academy | Smaller | Above | Above | Above | Year 1 |
| School 4 Dudley | Academy | Smaller | Below | Below | Above | No |
| School 5 Bradford | Secondary | Much larger | Above | Above | Above | No |
| School 6 Chalk Farm | Secondary Comprehensive | Larger | Above | Above | Above | Year 1 |
| School 7 London | Girls Comprehensive | Larger | Above | Average | Above | Year 1 |
| School 8 Derby | Academy | Larger | Above | Below | | No |
| School 9 Coventry | Academy Converter | Smaller | Above | Above | Above | Year 1 |
| School 10 Ashington | Academy | Larger | Above | Above | Below | Completed staff and student training but did not complete the programme |
| School 11 Widness | Academy Sponsor led | Smaller | Above | Above | Below | No |

| | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|--|------------------------------|--|---------|------------|---|
| School 12 Plymouth | Academy Converter | Larger | Above | Above | Below | Year 1 |
| School 13 Warrington | Academy Converter | Larger | Average | Below | Below | Completed staff and student training but did not complete the programme |
| School 14 Plymouth | Academy Sponsor led | Smaller | Average | Above | | No |
| School 15 Morpeth | Academy Converter | Larger | Well below | Below | Below | Year 1 |
| School 16 Manchester | Academy | Average | Above | Below | Above | Year 1 |
| School 17 Birmingham | Academy Converter | Larger | Well above | Above | Above | No |
| School 18 Devon | Secondary Comprehensive | Smaller | Below | Above | Below | Year 1 and 2 |
| School 19 Deal | Academy | | | | | Year 2 |
| School 20 Mansfield | Special school for pupils with SLCN | N/A | Below | All | Below | Year 2 |
| School 21 Newcastle upon Tyne | Special school | N/A | Below | All | Below | Year 2 |
| School 22 Wrexham | Special School Social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) | 23 pupils aged 7 to 17 years | All pupils placed by their local authority | All | None | Year 2 |
| School 23 Wells | Academy Converter | Much Larger | Below | Average | Much below | Year 2 |

Appendix 5: Map of Talk about Talk Secondary Schools (shown on the map by a star)



Appendix 6: Summary of demographic information of those schools participating in the comparison study

| School | Type | Size (compared to average) | No. of young people receiving Pupil premium compared to average | No. of young people with identified SEND compared to average | No. of young people learning English as an additional language compared to average | Did this school participate in Talk about Talk Secondary? |
|---------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------|--|---|---|--|
| 1 | Academy Sponsor led | Average | Above average | Above average | Below | Year 1 |
| 2 | Academy Converter | Small | Higher | Higher | Higher | Year 1 |
| 3 | Academy | Average | Above | Below | Above | Year 1 |

