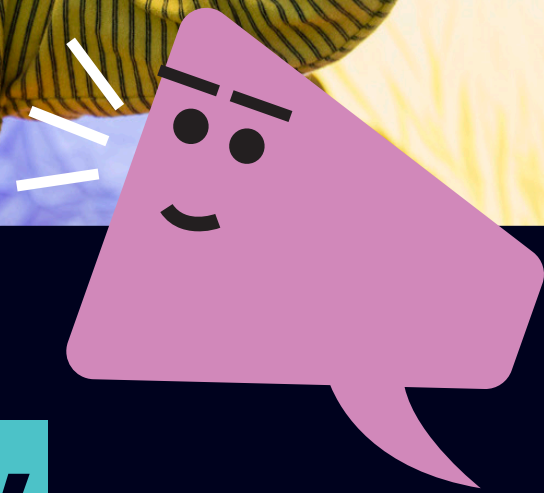


**Speech and  
Language UK**



Changing young lives.



# Getting in early

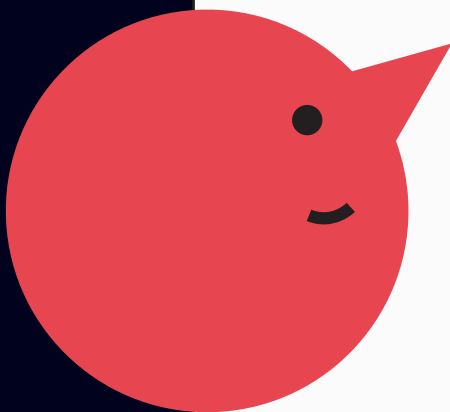
## Speech and language interventions that transform children's lives

[speechandlanguage.org.uk](https://speechandlanguage.org.uk)

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: 17-21 Wenlock Road, London, N1 7GT.

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# Labour party manifesto

“*Developing early communication skills is another key foundation for life, with serious knock-on consequences when development is delayed. Labour will fund evidence-based early-language interventions in primary schools, so that every child can find their voice*”.

**When in future, this new Labour government looks back at what it has achieved, will transforming the lives of children with speech and language challenges be one of the highlights?**

The Government has already stated its intention to support children with speech and language challenges with a clear commitment in the Labour Party manifesto to “*fund evidence-based early-language interventions in primary schools, so that every child can find their voice*”.<sup>1</sup> And it has committed in the 24/25 academic year to continue the previous government’s funding for the Nuffield Early Language Intervention for reception-aged children. The question is how should this policy be delivered in future years to maximise its impact on children and improve social justice? This commitment matters hugely to the 1.9 million children in the UK struggling to talk and understand words, and to their families. Delivering this policy so that the impact is truly felt by all those who would most benefit is now essential.

In recent years, it has often felt that there has been a real disconnect between promises made by past governments and the experiences of the public. This must change. People need to feel that promises made lead to a difference in their lives and improves their day-to-day. An intervention to support children with speech and language challenges offers a tangible opportunity to do this, but how this policy is delivered will be

critical to the impact it will have. The purpose of this report is to set out key factors that must be considered in the implementation of the commitment to fund early language interventions. Fundamental to this are the following factors:



**Timing:** The timing of interventions – nursery-aged as well as primary school children must benefit from the funding available.



**Choice:** The necessity of choice – having a range of approved interventions available for each nursery or school to choose what would benefit them the most.



**Identification:** An understanding of who would benefit most from support – tools to track talking and understanding words in early years as well as Key Stages 1 and 2.



**Training:** Giving key professionals training to help children’s speech, language and communication skills in all their interactions.

<sup>1</sup> Labour Party manifesto 2024: <https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Labour-Party-manifesto-2024.pdf>

“

**“Try to empathise and understand how bewildering the world is for a child who cannot communicate and be understood, and how absolutely fundamental the ability to communicate is to learn and participate in education and society generally. Investing in a child’s ability to learn will pay dividends in terms of the future for the individual and for society and the economy at large”.**

– Family member of child with speech and language challenges

**“Allow much earlier and much much faster access during the early stages of speech, at around three years-old when it becomes apparent that a child has difficulties. The current situation is appalling. Our grandson is nearly six years-old, and we can understand a maximum of 10% of what he says. This is going to wreck his life, friendships, relationships as we simply cannot understand him”.**

– Family member of child with speech and language challenges

# Why early language interventions matter

A child with speech and language challenges is at risk of:

## More mental health problems:

81% of children with emotional and behavioural disorders have significant speech and language challenges, often unidentified.<sup>2</sup> 45% of young people referred for mental health services have difficulties with language skills.<sup>3</sup>



## Worse literacy and numeracy:

6x more likely to be behind in English and 11x more likely to be behind in Maths at 11 years-old<sup>5</sup> with only 14% gaining a 9-5 pass at GCSE in English and Maths.<sup>6</sup>



## Increased offending:

At least 60% of young offenders have language difficulties.<sup>4</sup>



## Less secure employment:

2x more likely to experience insecure employment as adults.<sup>7</sup>



2 Hollo, A., Wehby, J. H., & Oliver, R. M. (2014). Unidentified language deficits in children with emotional and behavioral disorders: a meta-analysis. *Exceptional Children*, 80(2), 169–186: <https://doi.org/10.1177/001440291408000203>

3 Cohen, N. J., Farnia, F., & Im-Bolter, N. (2013). Higher order language competence and adolescent mental health. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 54(7), 733–744: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.12060>

4 Bryan, K., Garvani, G., Gregory, J., & Kilner, K. (2015). Language difficulties and criminal justice: the need for earlier identification. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders*, 50(6), 763–775: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1460-6984.12183>

5 Save the Children. (2015). *Early language development and children’s primary school attainment in English and Maths: New research findings*: <https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/content/dam/gb/reports/policy/early-language-development-and-childrens-primary-school-attainment.pdf>

6 Department for Education. (2024, 1 February). Key stage 4 performance: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/key-stage-4-performance>

7 Law, J., Rush, R., Schoon, I., & Parsons, S. (2009). Modeling developmental language difficulties from school entry into adulthood: literacy, mental health, and employment outcomes. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 52(6), 1401–1416: [https://doi.org/10.1044/1092-4388\(2009\)08-0142](https://doi.org/10.1044/1092-4388(2009)08-0142)

# 1. The timing of interventions

## - support for younger children must be included

“

**“High quality early education and childcare is a crucial opportunity to transform life chances. Too often it is unavailable, or unaffordable”.**

**Labour Party manifesto**

The reference to funding early language interventions in the Labour Party manifesto only specified primary schools. While a commitment to improving communication skills is very much welcome, focusing only on primary schools would be a significant oversight as it would miss a critical stage – pre-school children – where evidence has shown that interventions are hugely valuable.

“

**“Too many children arrive at primary school not ready to learn”.**

**Labour Party manifesto**

Language at two years-old predicts reading, maths and writing when children start school. By the end of reception year, approximately 20% of children in England are not at the expected level of learning for communication and language and 30% are not at the expected level for literacy, according to data from the early years foundation stage profile for 2022/23.<sup>8</sup>

The need to support speech, language and communication skills in children younger than school age is clear, and the benefits that intervention at this age can bring are powerful.



The Public Health England report, *Best start in speech, language and communication: supporting evidence*, sets out how fundamental the early years are in the development of speech, language and communication skills and makes the case for the prioritisation of the first 1,000 days of life and the time up to the transition to school.<sup>9</sup>

“

**“More than two decades of research has unequivocally demonstrated that weaknesses in language learning in the pre-school years increases the risk of poorer outcomes later in adolescence and early adulthood, namely, educational attainment, employment, mental health and general well-being”.**

**Reilly and McKean<sup>10</sup>**

<sup>8</sup> Department for Education. (2023, 30 November). *Early years foundation stage profile results, Academic year 2022/23* – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK ([explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk](https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk))

<sup>9</sup> Public Health England. (2020). *Best start in speech, language and communication: Supporting evidence*. London: PHE Publications: Best Start in Speech, Language and Communication: Supporting evidence ([publishing.service.gov.uk](https://publishing.service.gov.uk))

<sup>10</sup> Reilly, S. & McKean, C. (2023) Creating the conditions for robust early language development for all—Part 1: Evidence-informed child language surveillance in the early years. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders*, 58, 2222–2241. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1460-6984.12929>

A clear and concerning link has been shown between children's early language development and their performance in English and Maths throughout primary school. Of those children whose Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) language and communication scores at age five were below the expected level, 23% were working below the expected level in English at age 11. By comparison, of the children whose EYFSP language and communication scores at age five were at the expected level, 4% were working below the expected level in English at age 11.<sup>11</sup>

Developing speech, language and communication skills does not happen by accident - children need adults to support and nurture these skills. Poor language puts children at risk of poor reading and writing, poor behaviour and poor exam results. The earlier children receive support the better.

*The Marmot Review, Fair Society, Healthy Lives*, recognised the critical need for investment in early years and how *"returns on investment in early childhood are higher than in adolescence"*.

The report highlighted how high-quality pre-school programmes lead to stronger and more enduring effects on outcomes.<sup>12</sup> Save the Children also concluded, following their own research on data from the Millenium Cohort Study, undertaken by the UCL Institute for Education, that *"children without good early language skills are at far greater risk of struggling at primary school and leaving primary school without the basic building blocks of learning. Ensuring that all children start school with good language skills would enable many more children to do well in primary school and beyond"*.

There is also evidence showing that the need for support is particularly pronounced for certain groups, with Reilly and Mckean noting that, *"There is a robust association between a child's socio-economic circumstances and language outcomes. Put simply, children living in less advantaged circumstance have poorer language outcomes, which are apparent very early and persist across the lifespan"*.<sup>13</sup>



<sup>11</sup> Save the Children. (2015). *Early language development and children's primary school attainment in English and Maths: New research findings*: <https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/content/dam/gb/reports/policy/early-language-development-and-childrens-primary-school-attainment.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Marmot, M. *Fair society, healthy lives : the Marmot Review : strategic review of health inequalities in England post-2010*. (2010) ISBN 9780956487001

<sup>13</sup> Reilly, S. & McKean, C. (2023) Creating the conditions for robust early language development for all—Part 1: Evidence-informed child language surveillance in the early years. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders*, 58, 2222–2241. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1460-6984.12929>

# A current intervention for pre-school children

**Early Talk Boost**, developed by Speech and Language UK, is a targeted intervention aimed at three to four year-old children who need help with talking and understanding words.

The programme helps to boost children's language skills to narrow the gap between them and their peers and aims to accelerate children's progress in language and communication by an average of five months after nine weeks. The programme has been designed to replace or complement circle or group times and can be delivered to six to eight children at a time. It supports a range of foundation language skills, including: attention and listening, learning, and using new words and building sentences.

## An evaluation of the programme in 2015 revealed that:

- Children made statistically significant progress in their early language development.
- On average, children made five months' progress after the nine-week intervention, helping them to narrow the gap between them and other children their age. This was twice the rate of progress of children not having the intervention.<sup>14</sup>
- 95% of parents felt that Early Talk Boost had made a difference to their children's language and communication. Parents felt they had learnt something by being involved in the programme and would change how they talked to their child.



**“Early Talk Boost has been a fantastic experience for so many of our families [here](#)... The difference it has made has been incredible really, so I would definitely recommend it”.**

**Lynn, nursery headteacher**

<sup>14</sup> Reeves, L., Hartshorne, M., Black, R., Atkinson, J., Baxter, A., & Pring, T. (2018). Early Talk Boost: A targeted intervention for three year old children with delayed language development. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 34(1), 53–62. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265659018755526>

A new, independent evaluation of the programme has recently taken place in Ireland, 'The Early Talk Boost scaling up project independent evaluation' by Moloney et al. in 2024.<sup>15</sup> This mixed methods outcome-based evaluation reviewed 23 settings in total across two phases. The evaluation found a statistically significant increase in each of the language areas measured between the children's scores before and after the programme across each of the age groups, with the largest overall gains in the 36-to-42-month age group.

Early Talk Boost has now been included in the Irish Government's strategy, *Equal Start – a new model of government funded support with the aim of ensuring "children experiencing disadvantage can access and meaningfully participate in early learning and childcare"*.<sup>16</sup> As part of the package of activities this programme is introducing, Early Talk Boost will be rolled out to Equal Start target settings.

## Interventions being trialled and tested

There are also several initiatives targeting pre-school children that are currently being reviewed because of the [Department for Education's Early years education recovery programme](#). The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) is working with Stronger Practice Hubs across England to fund early years settings' access to evidence-informed programmes. These programmes are being assessed so that their impact on children's outcomes are more broadly understood. Initiatives that focus on speech, language and communication include the following and a summary of them from the EEF website is below:

- **Elklan's Communication Friendly Settings** is a whole-setting programme that aims to promote the speech, language and communication skills of all children. Online training and coaching are provided to two staff (Lead Communication Practitioners or LCPs) from each setting who then train and provide mentoring to the staff team in their nursery. This programme is currently a trial that will assess the impact of the programme on three to four year-olds in 166 state maintained, Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) early years settings.

- **The Early Years Conversation Project (EYCP)** is a professional development programme developed and delivered by the East London Research School. The project aims to promote conversational responsiveness by training two professionals from each setting. In PVI nurseries that will be the manager and room lead working with children aged two to three years-old. In school nurseries it will be the Early Years Foundation Stage Lead and the nursery teacher. The room lead or nursery teacher will be identified as the 'EYCP champion' from each setting. Practitioners are trained through one and a half days face-to-face training and six pre-recorded online modules. The EYCP will be evaluated using a randomised controlled trial and the evaluation report will be published in Spring 2026.

<sup>15</sup> Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. (2024, 28 May). *Equal Start for children experiencing disadvantage*: [www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie)

<sup>16</sup> Moloney, M., Egan, S., Pope, P., Breatnach., D. Burke-Hayes, M and Hoyne, C. *The Early Talk Boost scaling up project independent evaluation: Summary report*. Available at: [www.tusla.ie](http://www.tusla.ie)



• **NELI Preschool** is a 20-week oral language programme for three to four year-old children, centred around shared storybook reading and guided play and designed to improve the oral language skills of children in nursery. The NELI Preschool intervention is delivered by OxEd & Assessment and includes two core elements: universal language enrichment for all children in nursery (via whole group sessions) and targeted intervention for those with the weakest oral language skills (via small group and individual sessions). The programme will be evaluated through a randomised controlled trial with an evaluation report due to be published in Spring 2026 and an addendum looking at longer-term outcomes in Summer 2027.

• **Talking Time** is a universal intervention targeting the oral language skills of children aged three to five. It supports early years practitioners in delivering a programme of engaging, structured small-group activities to children. Children take part in two 15-minute activities per week during regular provision, for a period of 20 weeks. This project will be evaluated by the National Institute for Economic and Social Research through a randomised controlled trial, randomised at the setting level. The evaluation report will be published in Spring 2026.

Not only does the evidence show how critical it is to extend speech and language interventions to children of nursery age, but this approach would also be consistent with the Government's wider plans for supporting children. The Labour Party manifesto included an intention to open an additional 3,000 nurseries through upgrading space in primary schools, helping to address the childcare gap that currently exists.

There is wide consensus across the sector that it would be a huge, missed opportunity to have nursery-aged children in a school setting who are unable to benefit from speech and language interventions that have been shown to be so impactful for their age group because only children reception age and above are able to access them.

Interventions could also be provided to parents of children younger than three years-old through Family Hubs. Currently it is hard for them to provide any support to new parents around language development before the age of three, but if early language programmes were available in every Family Hub, then children would benefit from intervention at an early stage.



**Funding for speech and language interventions must be available for children below school age, as well as those at primary school.**

## 2. The necessity of choice

It is key in the delivery of speech and language interventions, that there is a selection of interventions for settings to choose from, rather than one single intervention being imposed on all. It is therefore welcome that the Labour Party manifesto referred to interventions in the plural, in recognition of this. One size fits all solutions are rarely successful and would be at odds with Labour's commitment to respect teachers.

Given the range of interventions in use that have been shown to offer real value, the Government should identify a suite of options that ensure the objectives of improved speech and language are met, alongside allowing schools and other settings to adopt a programme that suits their particular needs and requirements, from their local population to their in-house resources and skills. There will be variation in the circumstances of individual settings, which a flexible approach to interventions will be more reflective of. The percentage of children that would benefit from support may vary significantly and the nature and extent of staffing support available to deliver programmes may be different. The size of groups, the length of programmes, and who delivers the programme are key elements which settings will need to take into account when deciding which specific intervention is most suitable for them.

Having a number of potential interventions also provides opportunities for new providers to join the market and may increase the likelihood that potential providers will be incentivised to keep testing and assessing what interventions deliver the most for children. Using one intervention only could potentially deter others from evolving current methods and developing new approaches, as

well as risking disengagement from schools who do not like over-centralised schemes.

The approach to phonics schemes is a useful example of a strategy that could be adopted. There is an approved list of a range of phonics schemes that schools can use to decide what is most useful and suited to their setting. Those on the list have been through a process of validation, however, there is no statutory requirement for schools to choose a programme on the validated list.

There is already easily accessible information on a range of existing interventions, funded by a previous Labour government: the *What Works* database provides information on current, evidence-based interventions that aim to support children's speech, language and communication skills. Interventions can be searched according to target group, age range, focus of the intervention, who delivers it and the format of the intervention. Evidence for each intervention is rated by an academic moderating group as 'strong', 'moderate' or 'indicative'. *What Works* is maintained and further developed by the moderating group, representatives from the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists and Speech and Language UK. The Government could consider this database and other sources of readily available information if a process to validate interventions is undertaken.

**There must be a selection of validated interventions available to choose from, to allow settings to adopt interventions that are most suited to their particular requirements.**



# Interventions in primary school

## Talk Boost KS1

Talk Boost KS1 is a targeted programme for four to seven year-old children who are struggling with talking and understanding words, including children in Reception classes. The programme by Speech and Language UK is delivered in primary schools by classroom teachers and teaching assistants and provides a structured programme that boosts children's progress in language and communication.

Children who are selected to take part in the programme attend three sessions per week in small groups, each lasting 30–40 minutes delivered by the teaching assistant. In addition, the teacher runs a weekly whole-class activity and there are activities that can be practised at home.

Talk Boost KS1 has been evaluated twice, once in a study which compared the results of using Talk Boost KS1 in schools with a group in schools which didn't use it<sup>17</sup> and once as part of a whole school approach to supporting speech, language and communication needs, called *A Chance to Talk*. In both evaluations there were statistically significant results that showed on average children made between nine and 18 months progress in language levels over the ten-week period. Up to 80% of these children made good progress with language development, helping to narrow the gap between them and their peers.



## Talk Boost KS2

This targeted eight-week programme by Speech and Language UK is aimed at children between seven to 10 years-old who need help with talking and understanding words, to help them catch up with their peers.

The programme involves three sessions a week, delivered by a teaching assistant, along with weekly whole class activities and activities to practise at home. Results of an evaluation showed it is an effective intervention in narrowing the gap for children with delayed language skills<sup>18</sup>, with 65% of children who completed the programme working to expected levels in understanding and using vocabulary, compared to only 32% in the comparison group.<sup>19</sup>

## Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI)

This programme is designed for reception age children who need extra support with their language, speech development and early literacy skills. Trained staff deliver the programme in small groups of three to six children, along with individual sessions, for 20 weeks. Evidence has shown that the intervention helps children make up to three months additional progress.<sup>20</sup>

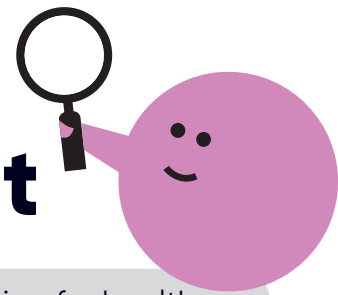
<sup>17</sup> Lee, W., & Pring, T. (2016). Supporting language in schools: Evaluating an intervention for children with delayed language in the early school years. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 32(2), 135–146. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265659015590426>

<sup>18</sup> Reeves, L., Freed, J., Wright, J., Wood, E., Black, R., Hartshorne, M., & Adams, C. (2019). Feasibility and evaluation of Talk Boost KS2: A school-based programme for oral language skills in children with low-average communication skills in Key Stage 2. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 35(3) 221–240. [doi.org/10.1177/0265659019874851](https://doi.org/10.1177/0265659019874851)

<sup>19</sup> I CAN. (2016). *Talk Boost KS2 Evaluation Report 2016*. [https://speechandlanguage.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/tbks2\\_evaluation\\_2016\\_report\\_sluk-1.pdf](https://speechandlanguage.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/tbks2_evaluation_2016_report_sluk-1.pdf) (speechandlanguage.org.uk)

<sup>20</sup> Department for Education. (2024, 4 May). *Early years education recovery programme: supporting the sector* – GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk))

# 3. Identifying who would benefit most from support



It's essential to build processes to identify those children who would benefit most from support with their speech, language and communication skills, into the pathways for support in nurseries and schools.

In 2017, the Government's *Social Mobility Action Plan*<sup>21</sup> included an ambition to close the word gap in early years, recognising that development gaps need to be tackled at the earliest opportunity – particularly early language and literacy skills. This plan included working in partnership with Public Health England, providing training, information and resources to early years staff and health visitors, which would help them to support young children's speech, language and communication development.

The Early Language Identification Measure (ELIM)<sup>22</sup> was subsequently produced in 2020. Public Health England's Early language identification measure and intervention guidance handbook noted that "*all children in England are offered a 2 to 2½ year review completed by the health visitor as part of their universal service*" and that "*The ELIM and intervention should be integrated into this review with all children to enhance identification of need*". The measure covers two sections: a 50-item word list to be completed with families during the review; and health visitor observation during the review.

However, delivery of this training for health visitors has stalled due to Covid and the redeployment of health visitors. It is time to ensure full and continuous roll out, so that all young children have the opportunity to have their needs identified at a young age. Key to delivering this is a review of where responsibility for the programme sits within government, and ideally the Best Start in Life team in the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities would resume responsibility. This should be alongside a wider programme to encourage take up of the two to two and-a-half-year review, as uptake for 2022 to 2023 was only 73.6%.<sup>23</sup>

It is important that a pathway of identification also covers school age children and that there is an opportunity for schools to be required to measure and track children's talking and understanding of words in the same way they do literacy and numeracy. The Government should support the development of a universally available, free tool that can be used at the start of KS1 and KS2 by class teachers to spot when children are struggling. Currently schools must pay commercial rates to do this. Many schools can't afford these rates. This is also a cost-inefficient way to procure a tool which every English school will need at some point.

**Key to improving speech, language and communication skills is identifying and intervening to provide support. There must be opportunities to do this integrated into current pathways.**

21 Department for Education. (2017). *Unlocking talent, fulfilling potential: A plan for improving social mobility through education* (Cm 9541)[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a82c6cb40f0b62305b94499/Social\\_Mobility\\_Action\\_Plan\\_-\\_for\\_printing.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a82c6cb40f0b62305b94499/Social_Mobility_Action_Plan_-_for_printing.pdf)

22 Public Health England, *Early language identification measure and intervention Guidance handbook*, 2020. [ELIM\\_Handbook\\_December-2020.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a82c6cb40f0b62305b94499/ELIM_Handbook_December-2020.pdf) ([publishing.service.gov.uk](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk))

23 Department of Health and Social Care. (2023, 7 November). *Health visitor service delivery metrics: annual data April 2022 to March 2023* - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk)). Office for Health Improvement and Disparities. [health-visitor-service-delivery-metrics-2022-to-2023\\_annual.ods](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6340b62305b94499/health-visitor-service-delivery-metrics-2022-to-2023_annual.ods)

# 4. Training to maximise the impact of interventions

Training and support for early years staff in supporting speech and language development can be hugely beneficial in the provision of everyday practice, above and beyond specific interventions.

The need for workforce training was referred to in the *Bercow Ten Years On* review, which highlighted that the expertise of the wider workforce in identifying and supporting the speech, language and communication needs of children and young people in England was inconsistent.<sup>24</sup>

The Early Years Professional Development Programme (EYPDP) delivered on behalf of the DfE by Education Development Trust in partnership with Speech and Language UK, recognises how critical the first five years of life are for children's development. The purpose of the eight month programme is to support early years practitioners in pre-reception settings to improve their practice and children's outcomes in communication and language, maths and PSED (personal, social and emotional development).

The first cohort of the EYPDP completed the programme in February 2024 and a subsequent evaluation found that 90% of practitioners agreed that they would recommend the programme to others, with 97% responding that they felt more knowledgeable across all three areas of content covered on the course.



**“The EYPDP has given me new ideas and a newfound enthusiasm for teaching certain areas of the EYFS.”**

EYPDP participant

**“Thank you for your excellent, kind support in the webinars. I am really enjoying it each week and although I have worked in early years for many years now, I am finding this course very useful and gaining new ideas and strategies each week to support the children I work with.”** Feedback from

early years practitioner, Tara

The EYPDP is currently funded by the DfE until March 2025 to deliver training to up to 10,000 early years practitioners across all Local Authorities in England. In addition to funding specific interventions, the Government should consider extending the delivery of the EYPDP so that all early years practitioners have the opportunity to benefit from it.

<sup>24</sup> | CAN and RCSLT. *Bercow Ten Years On: An independent review of provision for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs in England.* 2018.

# The impact of training

This kind of programme has the potential to radically change children's speech, language and communication skills and improve their readiness for school. These programmes should be extended in reach so that most children can benefit from them.

“

*“The programme has had a great impact on my provision, not only did it refresh previous knowledge but also taught me so much more. It gave me new ideas, and a new found enthusiasm for teaching certain areas of the EYFS. I have found the provision audits incredibly helpful, and made changes to my setting accordingly to accommodate the new things I have learned. The children have really benefited from this, and I have found good progress made in mathematics and communication and language”.*

**Charlotte, childminder**

*“Practitioners who have accessed the programme have feedback that they have learned so much, that they are much more confident in supporting children's learning and development now and that the impact of the programme is visible in the interactions they have with the children in their setting. They have enjoyed the programme and have been keen to share their skills with inspectors and to talk about the developments and changes that have been made within their settings as a result of taking part”.*

**Annette, local authority lead**

*“I would 100% recommend the EYPDP as it's the only training course of its type and has been expertly developed. The focus on subject areas such as Communication and Language, Early Mathematics, Personal Social Emotional Development are unique in their kind. Most early years CPD programmes are not subject specific, so my staff have really benefited from developing their knowledge in these key areas”.*

**Emma, early years setting manager**

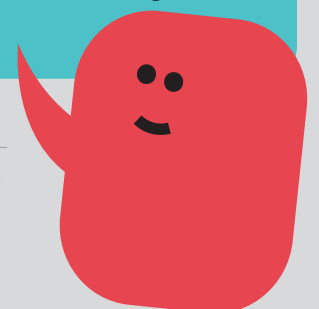
## Achieving early language goals

A combination of interventions and training can have remarkable results. For example, Speech and Language UK transformed children's outcomes in an area of West Somerset where only 57% of children were achieving a good level of development in early learning goals.<sup>25</sup> 100 practitioners received training in good speech and language practice and 151 children directly took part in an early language intervention. After this combination of interventions, 73% of children in the area achieved a good level of development in early learning goals,<sup>26</sup> which was above the national average of 72%.<sup>27</sup>

25 Department for Education. (2017). *West Somerset Opportunity Area 2017-20: A local plan to deliver opportunities for children and young people in West Somerset*. DfE Social Mobility Delivery Plan – West Somerset ([publishing.service.gov.uk](https://publishing.service.gov.uk))

26 Department for Education. (2021). *Opportunity Areas Insight Guide: Early years*. Opportunity Areas Insight Guide: Early Years ([publishing.service.gov.uk](https://publishing.service.gov.uk))

27 Department for Education. (2019, 17 October). *Early years foundation stage profile results in England, 2019*. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5da71c73ed915d429981330d/EYFSP\\_2019\\_Main\\_Text\\_Oct.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5da71c73ed915d429981330d/EYFSP_2019_Main_Text_Oct.pdf)



# Conclusion

**“Early years is about more than just childcare - it’s about giving every child the best possible start in life.”**

**Bridget Phillipson, Secretary of State for Education**

There is a clear case for intervening to improve speech, language and communication skills and while the commitment in the Labour Manifesto to fund evidence-based early language interventions in primary schools represents a step in the right direction, that alone will not fulfil the intention of ensuring *‘that every child can find their voice’*.

That is why it is so welcome to see not only the clear statement of broad support that the Secretary of State for Education has made for early years, with her commitment that it is *‘her number one priority’*,<sup>28</sup> but also her specific recognition of the need for *‘better outcomes for children through improved early language and maths support’*.

At Speech and Language UK, we fully support this prioritisation of early years and the inclusion of improved early language as a key component of this. In this report we have considered how the Government can maximise the impact it has on the lives of children who would benefit from speech, language and communication interventions, with four fundamental steps that must be taken now:

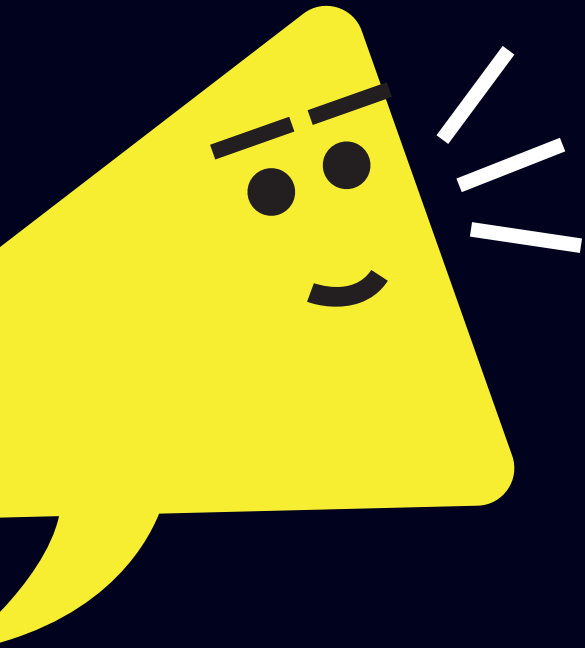
- Implementing a range of interventions in schools that reach nursery-age children as well as reception-aged children. We shouldn’t ask children to wait until reception for children to receive the language interventions that we know they would benefit from in a nursery setting.
- Allowing different settings to choose between interventions that fit their circumstances, which is a practical response to varied need and resource.
- Training health visitors better to identify which children would benefit from support. We shouldn’t leave it to chance that children who need help will receive it.
- Empowering staff in every childcare setting to support children’s speech, language and communication skills, so that every interaction becomes a meaningful opportunity to provide necessary support.



These actions taken together, would play a crucial role in transforming children’s speech, language and communication skills. They collectively could deliver for children now, to transform lives for the future.

**We know that acting early matters and that is because every child still matters.**

<sup>28</sup> Busby, E. (2024, 10 July). Education Secretary says early years is her ‘number one priority’. *The Standard*. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/bridget-phillipson-education-secretary-government-labour-london-b1169876.html>



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