

# MANIFESTO 2022

Unidentified and unsupported speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) and the resulting effect on a child's education and social and emotional wellbeing, can have lifelong and sometimes life-changing consequences for children and young people.

## Support equality of provision for children in Northern Ireland with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN)

### We are calling on our political parties to:

- Boost every child's early language development to ensure children get the best start in life and a fair start at school. The package should include parental support and pre-school screening.
- Require the health and education departments to plan together in a strategic, accountable and consistent way to benefit the Special Educational Needs (SEN) framework, services and area planning.
- Ensure that children with SEN get the same service across mainstream schools, support units and special schools by investing in commissioning of a multidisciplinary workforce.

## THE BACKGROUND

- Helping children to develop their speech, language and communication skills from their early years enables them to unlock their potential, maximise their academic achievement, make friends and thrive. Good early language skills promote good mental health and wellbeing, support long-term employability in adulthood and improve life chances.
- 1 in 4 children who struggled with language at age five did not reach the expected standard at the end of primary school.
- Speech, language and communication difficulties are among the most common types of special education needs in NI.
- Children with a mental disorder are five times more likely to have problems with speech and language.

## IN NORTHERN IRELAND

- 10% of children will have SLCN however in areas of social disadvantage in NI around 50% of children start school with delayed language and other identified communication needs.
- Speech and language therapists (SLTs) play a crucial role in supporting development of early language and communication, including direct work with children and families, training early years professionals and other education, health and care staff. However, a more joined-up, long-term approach to commissioning provision within early years is needed. This should take into account the costs and outcomes for the whole system and society in the longer term.
- More than 80% of children in nursery, primary one and primary two in special schools require support for SLCN and/or eating, drinking and swallowing needs as included in their statement of SEN.

- Between 2016 and 2020 the enrolment in special schools had increased by roughly 26%, however investment in SLT staffing has not kept pace with this increase. This has resulted in a widening gap between capacity and demand with the same number of SLTs supporting growing numbers of children within special schools.
- For children with SEN there is a postcode lottery of provision and inequity of access to speech language therapy, particularly for children attending learning support units attached to mainstream schools.

## STOKE SPEAKS OUT – INVESTING IN EARLY LANGUAGE FOR ALL CHILDREN

Stoke Speaks Out is a multi-agency initiative to tackle the high incidence of delayed language in Stoke-on-Trent identified in 2002 by the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Partnership Trust speech and language therapy department.

Between 2004 and 2020 the programme has trained over 8,000 practitioners in key messages around early attachment, child development and speech and language development for children. It has worked directly with families and children under seven, embedded key messages across the city and ensured the local workforce understand the importance and relevance of early speech, language and communication.

By 2010, six years after the launch of the programme, the percentage of children entering nursery with delayed language had reduced from 64% to 39% of children. Subsequently the programme has also led a School Readiness programme for the city, developed the Stoke Early Communication Screen and won a range of national awards.

## THE ECONOMIC BENEFIT

- The evidence is clear that early identification and intervention to support children's speech, language and communication is a well-evidenced, cost-effective approach shown to result in long term economic benefits. Return on investment (ROI) analysis of the early language intervention programme, Stoke Speaks Out, has demonstrated the contribution that the programme makes to improved school readiness for children at age five.
- Ensuring children with SEN have access to speech and language therapy can help promote access to the curriculum, positive behaviour and better social and emotional wellbeing. Effective communication support and strategies may also reduce the likelihood of more costly interventions such as exclusion from school, mental health support and placement breakdown.

For every £1 invested in the programme, £1.19 worth of value is created. This ROI is based on the achievement of one key outcome, improved school readiness at age five, and the associated fiscal savings.

When including long term outcomes such as the reduced likelihood of being not in employment, education or training, the ROI suggests savings of £4.26 for every £1 invested in the programme.

i Save the Children (2016) Early language development and children's primary school attainment in English and Maths: new research findings, London: Save the Children

ii Department of Education 2018/19 Statistical Bulletin available at: Special educational needs 201819.pdf (education-ni.gov.uk)

iii NHS Digital (2018) Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2017. <https://bit.ly/2TAn0qy>

iv Law, J., McBean, K and Rush, R. (2011) Communication skills in a population of primary school-aged children raised in an area of pronounced social disadvantage International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders, 46, (6) pp 657–664.

v Jordan, J., Coulter, L., McKeever, A and Dowling, C. (2013) Prevalence Of Speech And Language Delay In Primary One Children In The Downpatrick Area, South Eastern Health And Social Care Trust Speech And Language Therapy Department.

vi More information on Stoke Speaks Out is available online <https://www.stokespeaks.org/about>

vii NEF Consulting (2016). Stoke Speaks Out: Pilot Return on Investment. Online: [http://bit.ly/SSO\\_ROI](http://bit.ly/SSO_ROI)