**Briefing ahead of the debate on school exclusion on Wednesday 22 June 2022 from the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists in Wales**

**Summary**

* Communication skills are fundamental and foundational. They enable us to understand and to be understood and underpin social communication. They are central to our development, our ability to understand and manage our emotions, to form relationships, our educational achievement, social interaction, and life chances.
* The most common reason for pupils being excluded from mainstream education is disruptive behaviour; research shows that many children and young people who are excluded or at risk of exclusion have behavioural difficulties which co-occur with communication needs that are often unidentified and unsupported.
* As well as being at higher risk of school exclusion, children with unidentified communication needs are at risk of a range of negative outcomes later in life, including impacts on literacy, numeracy and educational attainment, mental health, employment and possible involvement in the criminal justice system.
* There is a clear correlation between many of the group of pupils who are disproportionately more likely to be excluded, and the groups of children and young people who are more likely to have communication needs, including looked after children, pupils eligible for free school meals, and pupils with additional learning needs.
* Given the high prevalence of communication needs in children and young people with behavioural difficulties, and the consequences of not supporting them, we believe a number of actions are required including training for all teachers and other staff working with pupils at risk of exclusion in recognising communication needs.

**The link between school exclusion and speech, language and communication needs**

Research shows that many children and young people who are excluded or at risk of exclusion have behavioural difficulties which co-occur with communication needs that are often unidentified and unsupported. For example:

* In a meta-analysis of 22 studies, **81%** of children with emotional and behavioural disorders were found to have communication needs that had not previously been identified (Hollo et al, 2014).
* A review of 26 studies found that **71%** of children formally identified with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) experienced clinically significant language deficits, and **57%** of children with diagnosed language deficits also were identified with EBD (Benner et al, 2002).
* A study of secondary age pupils at risk of school exclusion found that for a high proportion of the pupils, language difficulties were a factor in their behaviour problems and school exclusion (Clegg et al, 2009).
* In a study of pupils at risk of exclusion from school, **two thirds** were found to have speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) (Clegg et al, 2004).
* In a study of excluded boys, **100%** had undetected communication needs and behavioural issues (Ripley et al, 2005).

Data from speech and language therapy services working in alternative provision also supports this link

* An independent speech and language therapy service commissioned to provide input to a large secondary alternative provision setting found that **90%** of the pupils assessed had communication needs.
* Pupil referral units in the London Borough of Newham screen all children and young people for communication needs the day before they are due to attend. In 2016/17, **90%** of the cohort presented with moderate-significant speech and language difficulties, and only a small number of these had previously had their communication needs identified (RCSLT, 2017).

**Correlation between SLCN and groups of learners more likely to be excluded**

There is a clear correlation between many of the groups of pupils who are disproportionately more likely to be excluded, and the groups of children and young people who are more likely to have communication needs.

**Looked after children**

A high proportion of children and young people in the care system have communication needs, much of which is unidentified and unsupported: •

* In a recent study, **90%** of care leavers had below average language ability, and **60%** met criteria for having DLD – a likely lifelong conditions where children have problems understanding and/or using spoken language. None of these young people had previously been diagnosed with SLCN (Clegg et al, 2021).
* **58%** of the young people screened by speech and language therapists as part of No Wrong Door, North Yorkshire County Council’s model around rethinking care for adolescents, were identified as having SLCN (Lushey et al, 2017).

**Pupils eligible for free school meals**

Communication difficulties are much more prevalent in children and young people in areas of social disadvantage:

* Studies have found that around **50%** of children in areas of high social disadvantage have delayed language or other identified SLCN (Locke et al, 2002; Law et al, 2011 ).
* Children who are eligible for free school meals and live in more deprived neighbourhoods are **more than twice** as likely to have identified SLCN (Dockrell et al, 2012).

**Children with Additional Learning Needs**

Data from Welsh Government shows that as with other learners the attendance of learners with additional learning needs has decreased overall (Welsh Government, 2022). SLCN are the most common type of additional learning need in 4-11 year olds. Not all children have the speech, language, and communication skills they need to fully engage with their education. Two children in every class of thirty, or **7.58%** of children, start school with Developmental Language Disorder. A further **2.34%** of children start school with a language disorder associated with another condition, such as autism, brain injury, Down’s syndrome, cerebral palsy, hearing impairment or learning disabilities (Norbury et al, 2016). As highlighted above, there is also a strong correlation between poverty and delayed language.

**The consequences of exclusion**

Research shows clearly that both young people who have been excluded from school and young people with SLCN are over-represented in the criminal justice system:

* a study of the educational background of young people in custody showed that **88%** of boys and **74%** of girls had been excluded from school; and 36% of boys and 41% of girls said they were 14 years or younger when they were last in education (Murray, 2012).
* at least **60%** of young people in the UK who are accessing youth justice services present with communication needs which are largely unrecognized (Bryan et al, 2015).

**What is needed**

Given the high prevalence of communication needs in children and young people with behavioural difficulties, we believe that a number of key actions are required;

* training for new teachers and as continuous professional development for existing staff members on how to support speech, language and communication skills, and how to identify and support SLCN.
* a focus on ensuring support staff are able to assist teachers in the provision of universal and targeted services to support language development in schools – a key element of the curriculum.
* training for Estyn inspectors to evaluate the impact of oracy education in schools, building on positive steps forward taken in relation to training for Childcare Inspectorate Wales and Estyn inspectors in relation to speech, language and communication in early years settings.
* actions to identify and support learners with SLCN are considered as a key element in the forthcoming planned revision of the statutory guidance on exclusion.
* Beyond education, there needs to be a clear focus on identifying and supporting SLCN amongst agencies most in contact with those at risk of exclusion. For example, we recommend that the team supporting looked after children has access to specially commissioned speech and language therapy services.

**Further information**

We would be happy to provide further information if this would be of interest. Please see below our contact details.

**Dr. Caroline Walters, External Affairs Manager (Wales), Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists**

**caroline.walters@rcslt.org**

**07541 986747**

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