



Briefing for Schools Bill,

House of Lords Committee Stage, June 2022

LORD WATSON OF INVERGOWRIE 171J★_ After Clause 65, insert the following new Clause—

“Duty to report on spoken language and communication

The Secretary of State must lay a report before Parliament each year during the period of five years beginning with the day on which this Act is passed, setting out—

- a) the overall level of school pupils’ spoken language and communication ability in academies, independent educational institutions and maintained schools;
- b) the provision available to develop pupils’ spoken language and communication skills in academies, independent educational institutions and maintained schools;
- c) the provision available to support pupils with speech, language and communication needs in academies, independent educational institutions and maintained schools.”

LORD WATSON OF INVERGOWRIE 171K★_ After Clause 65, insert the following new Clause—

“Ofsted inspections: provision relating to spoken language and communication skills

- a) When inspecting schools, the Chief Inspector must assess the provision available to develop pupils’ spoken language and communication skills.
- b) Schools rated as “inadequate” in terms of such provision cannot be rated “good” or “outstanding” overall.”

Purpose of the amendments

These are probing amendments to clarify how the Government will ensure children are adequately supported in schools to develop proficiency in spoken language¹. In particular, the amendments seek to test:

- How the Government will support schools to address the ongoing impact of school closures on children's spoken language across all ages ([1.5 million children and young people are at risk of being left behind with their speaking and understanding language because of the pandemic](#)).
- How the Government will raise the status of spoken language in the education system in order to reflect its importance to children and young people's outcomes in education, as per the [evidence from the Education Endowment Foundation](#).
- How the Government will ensure that every teacher is equipped to understand how to develop children's spoken language skills and ability, and can identify those who struggle with their speech, language and communication, and are in need of further support.

Why children's spoken language matters

Spoken language underpins literacy development and vocabulary acquisition. It is central to learning across the curriculum.

The recent [Schools White Paper 'Opportunity for all'](#), published in March 2022, sets an ambitious target for 90% of all children to achieve the expected standard in reading, writing and maths at the end of primary school. Within it the Government has recognised the importance of early language skills in building strong foundations for literacy and numeracy in the White Paper.

Yet, despite the welcome focus on Early Language, the Schools White paper has failed to address the widening language gap between disadvantaged students and their peers as children move through school and is missing substantial proposals to sustain Early Years efforts to develop all children's language and communication.

Evidence from the [Education Endowment Foundation demonstrates that oral language interventions](#) (teaching and learning with an emphasis on spoken language) enable an average of

¹ In this briefing, for ease we use 'spoken language' throughout. We take a broad and inclusive definition. We are talking about supporting children through oracy. We are also talking about supporting children and young people with speech, language and communication needs. This includes those who speak using Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) and sign languages, such as British Sign Language.

6 months additional academic progress over the course of a year, listed as one of the highest impact and low cost interventions that can be made in the classroom².

There have been long-term challenges with developing children's spoken language skills and with supporting children and young people with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).

The DfE's own statistics show the scale of the challenge:

- In 2019, 27% of children finished their reception year without the early communication and reading skills that were deemed necessary by DfE to thrive (Expected Level by Early Learning Goal 2019). That's 8 in every classroom.
- 22.5% of pupils with special needs in England have Speech, Language and Communication Needs as their primary need, the largest category of special need within the SEN Support system. This number has been steadily rising (DfE 2021). It is recognised in the Government's [SEND Review Green Paper](#).

In addition:

- **one in ten** children have a long-term speech, language and communication need (SLCN).³
- as many as **50% of children in areas of social disadvantage** start school with language difficulties.⁴
- **7% of all children** have Developmental Language Disorder (DLD), a lifelong condition, which affects how they understand and express language.⁵

Children's spoken language: the impact of the pandemic

We know that children of **all ages** have missed out on months of opportunities to develop their spoken language since the start of the pandemic.

- Ofsted's [recent report on education recovery](#) in schools highlights gaps in pupils' speaking and listening skills.
- [Research by the Oracy APPG](#), supported by Voice 21, shows that at the end of lockdown, two thirds of primary teachers across all ages and nearly half of secondary

² The White Paper quotes the same source of evidence from the [Education Endowment Foundation's teaching and learning toolkit](#) that "tuition enables students to make 4 months progress in primary and 2 months in secondary". Extending the school day demonstrates students can make 3 months progress.

³ <http://www.bercow10yearson.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/337644-ICAN-Bercow-Report-WEB.pdf>

⁴ Locke, A., Ginsborg, J. & Peers, I. (2002) Development and Disadvantage: implications for early years International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders Vol 37:1 & 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.

⁵ Norbury, C.F., Gooch, D., Wray, C., Baird, G., Charman, T., Simonoff, E., Vamvakas, G. and Pickles, A. (2016), The impact of nonverbal ability on prevalence and clinical presentation of language disorder: evidence from a population study. J Child Psychol Psychiatr, 57: 1247-1257. <https://acamh.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jcpp.12573>

teachers said school closures had a negative effect on the spoken language development of students eligible for pupil premium, compared with 1 in 5 teachers for their most advantaged pupils.

- [Evidence from the Oracy APPG's inquiry](#) also showed that less than half of primary teachers and only a quarter of secondary teachers said they were confident in their understanding of the 'spoken language' requirements outlined in the National Curriculum.
- I CAN's survey of teachers found that [1.5 million children are at risk of not developing the spoken language skills they need](#). 63% of teachers surveyed think the UK Government is not providing enough support to help children with their speaking and understanding and 56% of teachers surveyed think the government has not offered very much/ any extra support at their school to help children and young people with their speaking and understanding.
- Furthermore, children who depend on speech and language therapy have also been impacted severely. A survey by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists found that [81% of children and young people had less speech and language therapy during lockdown](#). 62% had no speech and language therapy at all.

The impact of poorer spoken language skills

While efforts around language development in the early years are crucial, the 'language gap' widens as children move through school. This needs addressing at every age and stage of education.

- Poor language skills at age 5 significantly impact on children's literacy and numeracy at age 11.⁶
- Vocabulary skills at age 13 strongly predict both maths and English GCSE results.⁷

Longer-term reform that is needed

The Government's recognition of the centrality of spoken language to children's attainment is welcome.

⁶<https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/early-language-development-and-childrens-primary-school-attainment-english-and-maths-new-0/>

⁷ Spencer, S., Clegg, J., Stackhouse, J., and Rush, R. (2017). Contribution of spoken language and socioeconomic background to adolescents' educational achievement at age 16 years. *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*, 52, pp. 184-96.

- The National Curriculum and the [DfE's 2021 Reading Framework](#) (for Reception and Year 1) both recognise the importance of spoken language.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) places Communication and Language Development on a statutory footing as one of the three Foundations of child development and all schools and Ofsted-registered early years providers must follow the EYFS.
- At a joint meeting of the [Oracy and Speech and Language All Party-Parliamentary Groups](#) in March 2022, Schools Minister, Robin Walker said:
 - *'It is my personal mission to help make England a world leader in literacy, and spoken language development is a core part of those plans.'*

We welcome all of this. But we are calling for further clarity of how this commitment to spoken language will be realised through the new reforms set out in the Schools Bill, Schools White Paper and in the SEND Review.

The status of spoken language in the education system (the National Curriculum, accountability frameworks, guidance and education policy) does not fully reflect its value and importance to children and young people's outcomes in school and life. We need to:

1. Raise the status and priority of spoken language in education, including:

- Embedding spoken language across the curriculum to better reflect its importance and to sustain efforts in the Early Years where language and communication are a central part of the curriculum.
- Developing clear non-statutory guidance for the explicit teaching of spoken language at all ages and stages in school (the 2023 Reading Framework for Primary and Secondary Schools should sufficiently emphasise the importance of spoken language for developing children's literacy).
- Increased recognition from Ofsted that spoken language is valued at inspection with training and guidance for inspectors on how to inspect schools' oracy provision.

2. Equip teachers and schools to develop their students' spoken language, including:

- A focus on knowledge and skills around spoken language across the children's workforce, ideally as part of Initial Teacher Training and the Early Career Framework.
- Improved access to high quality CPD and resources, and expansion of the remit of English Hubs beyond Reception and Year 1 to include the entire primary phase with spoken language as a key support area.

- Ensuring the new National Professional Qualifications in Literacy, Special Educational Needs and Early Years include an evidence-led focus on developing and supporting spoken language skills.
- Support for schools to monitor students' progress in oracy including sharing a clear progression framework.

3. Make children's spoken language is a key pillar of Covid education recovery, including:

- Encouraging schools to use their Pupil Premium and Recovery Premium funding to address immediate speech, language and communication needs and to boost the quality of spoken language teaching and learning in schools in the longer-term.
- Support for the development of spoken language as a strategic priority for the Education Investment Areas over and above the current proposals for them.

4. Ensure children with Speech, Language and Communication Needs are adequately supported, including:

- Monitoring of measures to address Speech Language and Communication Needs within Pupil Premium reporting.
- Training for tutors (who are part of the NTP) in how to identify children struggling with their speech, language and communication and how to support them.
- Including targeted and Specialist interventions for spoken language beyond the Early Years in the EEF Accelerator fund.
- The SEND Review must ensure that those children and young people with speech, language and communication needs are identified and receive the support they need, including speech and language therapy where required.

Further information

For further details on the centrality of spoken language to literacy and numeracy please see [here](#).

For more information, please contact

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