



APPG on Speech and Language Difficulties

Exclusions review: Call for evidence

1. Executive summary

- The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Speech and Language Difficulties welcomes the review into exclusions.
- In its 2013 report, ***The links between speech, language and communication needs and social disadvantage***, the APPG examined the links between speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) and behaviour.
- The APPG report highlighted that SLCN have a knock-on effect on many aspects of children and young people's schooling and on their future opportunities in the workforce.
- It also highlighted that the boredom and frustration of children who cannot engage properly with their education can lead to truancy or exclusion.
- Given the high prevalence of communication needs in children and young people with behavioural difficulties, and the consequences of not supporting them, the APPG on Speech and Language Difficulties recommends that staff working with excluded pupils and those at risk of exclusion, have access to specially commissioned speech and language therapy services. This would enable:
 - **Identification** – in line with Department for Education guidance: “where there are concerns about behaviour there should be an assessment to determine whether there are any causal factors such as... difficulties with speech and language”.¹
 - **Training** – all staff working with excluded pupils or those at risk of exclusion should be trained in recognising and responding appropriately to communication needs.
 - **Support** – speech and language therapy should be provided to those children and young people who need it, as well as on-going advice and support to staff to enable them to meet the needs of individual children and young people.

2 Speech, language and communication needs and behaviour

2.1 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.

2.2 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.

3 APPG report: ***The links between speech, language and communication needs and social disadvantage***

3.1 These links were borne out in the evidence the APPG received when researching and writing its 2013 report, ***The links between speech, language and communication needs and social disadvantage***.³

3.2 The decision to research and publish the report stemmed from the APPG's growing realisation that the inability of children to communicate, either with their peers or with others including their teachers, is a scourge that blights their lives in our communication-focused society. It has a knock-on effect on many aspects of their schooling and on their future opportunities in the workforce. The boredom and frustration of children who cannot engage properly with their education can lead to truancy or exclusion.

3.3 The APPG received extensive evidence highlighting the links between speech, language and communication needs and behaviour. Professor Karen Bryan, the then Head of the School of Health and Social Care, University of Surrey, told the APPG in her oral evidence about the relationship between SLCN and youth offending. She suggested that children with SLCN face what she calls a compounding risk: their communication difficulties put them at risk of literacy difficulties and this in turn puts them at risk of further educational problems; then as they come to adolescence they have problems coping with peers, with school and with family relationships and their communication difficulties become labelled as behavioural problems. She reported that 60% of young offenders have speech, language and communication problems. She also referred to studies showing that four out of five young people not in education, employment or training and a large proportion of young people excluded from school have speech, language and communication problems. She drew attention to the effectiveness of speech and language therapy in helping young offenders to improve their language skills and contrasted the cost of providing it with the much larger cost of keeping a young person in the criminal justice system.

3.4 The APPG also heard evidence from a population-based study that social communication or 'pragmatics' mediates (i.e. reduces) the effect of social disadvantage on adolescent behaviour. The APPG, therefore, concluded that there may be a causal relationship between social communication and behaviour and that targeting social communication could reduce teenage behavioural problems.

3.5 The APPG recommended a focus on social communication in the later years of primary school and not just earlier on in order to improve teenage behaviour.

4 Recommendations

4.1 Given the links between speech, language and communication needs and behaviour, including behaviour that could lead to exclusion or worse, the APPG recommends that staff working with excluded pupils and those at risk of exclusion, have access to specially commissioned speech and language therapy services. This would enable:

- **Identification** – in line with Department for Education guidance: “where there are concerns about behaviour there should be an assessment to determine whether there are any causal factors such as... difficulties with speech and language”.²
- **Training** – all staff working with excluded pupils or those at risk of exclusion should be trained in recognising and responding appropriately to communication needs.
- **Support** – speech and language therapy should be provided to those children and young people who need it, as well as ongoing advice and support to staff to enable them to meet the needs of individual children and young people.

Unless children and young people's speech, language and communication needs are identified as early as possible and appropriately responded to they are more at risk of being excluded from school and being unable to access and meaningfully engage with interventions designed to prevent exclusions.

References

1 Department for Education (2016). Mental health and behaviour in schools. Departmental advice for school staff.

2 *ibid.*

3 APPG on Speech and Language Difficulties, *The links between speech, language and communication needs and social disadvantage*, 2013. https://www.rcslt.org/about/parliamentary_work/appg_report_feb_2013