

Many excluded pupils or pupils at risk of exclusion have unidentified speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). Speech and language therapists have a key role to play in identifying and supporting those needs.

**The links between communication and school exclusion**

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.

**The size of the issue**

- **71%** of children formally identified with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs experience clinically significant language deficits, according to a review of 26 studies (Benner et al, 2002).
- **2/3** of pupils at risk of exclusion from school were found to have SLCN in one study (Clegg, 2004).
- **90%** of pupils in a large secondary alternative provision assessed by an independent speech and language therapy service had communication needs.

**The risks of not identifying and supporting communication needs include:**

- Literacy difficulties impacting on educational attainment
- Difficulties forming friendships, peer rejection and isolation
- Increased risk of being bullied or being a bully
- Verbally based behavioural interventions are ineffective

**How speech and language therapy can help**

- **Identifying needs:** Speech and language therapists have a key role in identifying speech, language and communication needs which may be an underlying factor in behaviour.
- **Training:** Speech and language therapists can provide training to staff in alternative provision on creating communication friendly environments and how to adapt both teaching and behaviour management strategies.
- **Direct support:** Helping the young person to understand the behaviour that is expected in a way that is meaningful for them, and teaching them the communication skills necessary to behave in the required way.