



Assessing and supporting speech, language and communication needs: **WellComm Primary**

Alex Grady from nasen talks about speech language and communication needs and how the new WellComm Primary can support schools in meeting them.

Speech, language and communication needs are at the top of the list of priority areas for many SENCOs and others working with children and young people.

It is well established that many children beginning school do not have the communication skills they need to be able to access the curriculum and school life successfully; in some areas, this figure is estimated to be as high as 50%.

These children will not all have an identifiable speech, language and communication need (SLCN), and many are likely to make rapid progress once in a language-rich environment, but a significant proportion will have long-term and more considerable needs.

The Communication Trust states that around 10% of all children will have SLCN. SEN data from 2019 shows that 23% of children receiving SEN Support and 15% of those with Education, Health and Care Plans have SLCN identified as their primary need.

These figures are likely to be an under-estimate, as it is known that some children's needs in this area are not accurately identified, sometimes falling under Moderate Learning Difficulty or

social, emotional and mental health needs (at least 60% of young people in the youth justice system have SLCN, Communication Trust 2019).

There is also a large variation across the age range: 54% of four-year-olds have SLCN, compared to nine per cent of 15-year-olds (SEN in England, 2019).

The Government has recognised children's development of speech, language and communication as a priority, and is investing in programmes to support the home learning environment and developing the skills of health visitors and early years practitioners, with the aim of closing the 'word gap'.

Department for Education figures show that 28% of four-and five-year-olds do not meet the expected communication and literacy levels by the end of EYFS2. The Bercow: Ten Years On report (2018) showed, however, that many children with SLCN are not getting the support they need. The report recommended that early identification and intervention are crucial.

Unfortunately, as the 'We need to talk' (2019) report from the Children's Commissioner, Anne Longfield, demonstrated, there is enormous variation across the country in access to speech and language therapy.

All of these factors mean that it is more important than ever that all schools have effective, evidence-based tools to both identify and support children with SLCN.

The original WellComm Early Years toolkit from GL Assessment, which has an age range of six months to six years, has been around for a number of years and has been used successfully in early years and Key Stage 1. Some settings use it as a screening tool for their whole intake, and it has been used to support referrals for speech and language therapy, as well as to provide interventions for those children identified as needing them.

Due to the success of the original toolkit, GL Assessment has now published a WellComm Primary toolkit which has an age range of 6-11 years, so can be used with children from Y2 to Y6. It is quick and simple to use (requiring no speech and language expertise) and allows SENCOs, teachers and teaching assistants to easily identify the children in their care who need speech and language support. It also includes around 50 instant, play-based activities in its Big Book of Ideas so education professionals can

take action straight away to support those children who need it.

The pack contains four books: The Handbook (which provides clear guidance on how to use the pack), The Little Book of Score Sheets and Rules (containing photocopiable test sheets and guidance on carrying out the tests), The Big Book of Ideas (mentioned above, containing a wealth of activities for each of the areas of language in each age range) and The Picture Book (with all the pictures you need to conduct the tests).

The pack can be used for both summative and formative assessment purposes; with targeted pupils or to screen a wider group. To make tracking easier, there is an online report wizard ('WellComm Wizard').

The pack has many other useful features, including:

- ◆ **Advice on running language groups**
- ◆ **Advice on using the pack with pupils with English as an additional language**
- ◆ **A section on language development, indicating what typical development looks like for different age groups. Some of this could be used as part of CPD for all staff, not just those implementing the tests or interventions**
- ◆ **A section on policy and development, which looks at research including the Bercow: Ten Years On report, and links to social, emotional and mental health (including the fact that 81% of children with SEMH needs have significant language and social skills difficulties, Botting et al, 2016)**
- ◆ **Each of the activities has 'step up' and 'step down' activities which are very helpful for differentiation**
- ◆ **Useful advice on stammering, reluctant talkers, and memory difficulties etc..**

WellComm Primary is a useful and timely addition to a SENCO's toolkit. It is clear and easy to use, and the fact that it contains activities as well as assessment tools means that it can be used for intervention as well as identification.

Whether you have easy access to a speech therapist or not, it will enable any primary setting to feel confident that they are using an effective approach which, along with high-quality teaching and enabling environments, will help to meet the SLCN of their pupils.

