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## Curriculum Through a SEND Lens in a Multi-Academy Trust

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## Improving identification and intervention for Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN)

**From fragmented support to unified strategy:**  
Strengthening SLCN provision across a local area

**Professional Development Group**

### Summary

In response to a growing demand for support around speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), a small unitary authority in the southwest of England embarked on a collaborative journey to improve how these needs were identified and addressed. The initiative brought together SENDCos, NHS professionals, and the Integrated Care Board to form a Professional Development Group focused on SLCN. Through the development of new toolkits, the sharing of best practices, and the piloting of targeted strategies, the group laid the foundation for a more consistent and locality-based approach to SLCN provision across all educational phases. The result has been a marked improvement in cross-sector collaboration and a clearer, more unified strategy for supporting children and young people with SLCN.

### Setting and Context

This case study focuses on a small Unitary Authority where SLCN is one of the most prevalent needs among the 1,698 children and young people with EHCPs. In 2023, a collaborative effort involving parents, carers, and professionals led to the creation of new Graduated Response Toolkits, including one specifically for SLCN. Despite these resources, SENDCos across phases reported inconsistent identification and intervention practices, particularly for older pupils.

### What They Did

To address these challenges, the SENDCo Forum initiated a Professional Development Group with a clear focus on improving SLCN provision. This group became a hub for collaboration, bringing together expertise from education and health sectors to tackle the issue from multiple angles.

### Key Actions Taken

#### Collaborative Training and Planning

One of the first steps was to strengthen professional development through joint training sessions. NHS speech therapists worked closely with SENDCos to deliver targeted training that focused on effective identification strategies. These sessions encouraged knowledge-sharing across different settings and helped build a common understanding of best practices in SLCN support.

## Key Actions Taken (continued)

### Tool Implementation

The group introduced the Language Enrichment Group identification and intervention tool, which was piloted in Key Stages 1 and 2. These pilots provided valuable insights into how structured tools could support early identification and intervention. Work also began to extend these strategies into Years 7 and 8, recognising the importance of continuity as pupils transition through different stages of education.

### Gap Analysis

As the initiative progressed, it became clear that there was a lack of effective tools for older pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4. This gap prompted further collaboration and innovation, with the group beginning to explore and develop age-appropriate interventions that could meet the needs of adolescents more effectively.

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## Outcomes and Impact

The initiative has led to a significant shift in how SLCN is perceived and addressed across the local area. It is now recognised as a strategic priority, and the collaboration between education and health professionals has deepened. Identification and intervention strategies are being refined and tested, with the aim of scaling them for broader application. Importantly, the work is informing the development of locality-based principles that will support consistent and equitable SLCN provision across all educational phases.

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## Key Learnings for Other Settings

This case study offers valuable insights for local authorities and school networks aiming to improve SLCN provision:

- **Cross-Phase Collaboration Is Essential:** A unified approach across primary and secondary phases ensures continuity of support.
- **Health and Education Partnerships Strengthen Impact:** Joint training and planning with NHS professionals enhance expertise and alignment.
- **Toolkits Must Be Age-Responsive:** Identification and intervention strategies should be tailored to different key stages.
- **Professional Development Drives Change:** Structured forums enable shared learning and consistent practice.
- **Locality-Based Planning Builds Sustainability:** Embedding principles across settings ensures equitable access to SLCN support.