Speech, Language and Communication: Universal and targeted approach

Speech, Language and Communication: Universal and targeted approach

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This Action Research case study was completed as part of the Department for Education (DfE, UK) nasen Universal SEND programme.

Abstract

Context: This action research project was conducted in an alternative provision secondary school to address the needs of students with speech, language, and communication needs (SLCN). Recognising the high prevalence of SLCN in the setting, the study aimed to implement a whole-school universal approach, supported by a targeted referral pathway for more complex needs.

Aims: The primary aim of this action research is to develop and evaluate a structured approach to support students with SLCN. This involves refining a research question through iterative cycles of planning and review, ultimately leading to improved strategies and processes in the school environment for both staff and students with SLCN.

Methods: The research employs an action research cycle methodology, which includes continuous cycles of planning, implementation, and review. Ethical consent has been obtained to ensure anonymity for participant data. Staff training and questionnaires were utilised to assess confidence levels in SLCN strategies, gather training needs, and evaluate the perceived effectiveness of training initiatives.

Findings: Staff confidence in identifying and supporting SLCN improved, with 86% attending training and 70% reporting confidence in planning for SLCN. However, inconsistencies in practice and a lack of resources remained challenges. Staff valued practical training and requested more targeted support, especially for teaching assistants. The introduction of learning maps, a referral pathway, and a whole-school checklist helped embed consistent strategies.

Implications: The findings suggest that a consistent whole-school approach, including effective resource sharing and dedicated support for SLCN, may enhance the educational experience for these students. The study also highlights the importance of ongoing training for staff and the need for strategies that promote a vocabulary-rich environment. Other educators may consider similar structured frameworks to address SLCN in their contexts while remaining cognizant of the unique challenges presented in identifying and supporting these needs.

Keywords

Inclusion, special educational needs and disabilities; alternative provision; speech, language and communication needs; whole school approach; referral pathway

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Action Research for Inclusion and Special Educational Needs and Disability (ISEND): Case Study

Speech, Language and Communication: Universal and targeted approach

To remove barriers for those with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), a whole-school universal approach was developed with a referral pathway for those with more complex needs. The universal approach was developed through continuing professional development for staff (CPD), evaluation of staff confidence, and learning walks. The development of a referral pathway includes the use of the Communication Trust's progression tool (Alternative Provision, Secondary).

Contents

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Type of setting	Alternative Provision Secondary School: Solihull Academy
Age range of pupils	Ages 11-16
Roles of the Research Team	School Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO)

ACTION RESEARCH CYCLES

Appendix 1 shows the Action Research Cycles

Ethical consent has been sought to publish this data anonymously.

SUMMARY

Research focus	Speech, Language and Communication needs within Alternative provision
Research question	How can we best provide for children with identified and unidentified SLCN within an alternative provision?

Overview/Key information	- School and Ofsted identified a weakness in the provision for children with SLCN. - We looked for a **universal screening tool** to better identify children with a SLCN. - Screening tools available do not suit the needs of children within an alternative provision, and the research points towards a universal approach, as most of our children may have an SLCN, and those without will not be negatively impacted by the support. - The school identified an **online SLCN course** for all staff to complete as a way to increase SLCN awareness. - The school commissioned the SLCN therapist team to deliver two sessions to improve the identification of children with potential SLCN and provide recommended strategies to support them appropriately. - Feedback form to **assess staff confidence**. - Where needs are complex and enduring, students will be referred for further support via **the referral pathway, which** includes the use of the **Communication Trust progression tool.** - Calendared **learning walks** to evaluate the impact of SLCN training in line with the school improvement plan. - The key value in the project was to move our focus from **identifying undiagnosed/unidentified needs to whole school approaches aimed at effectively providing for a range of pupils**. It is estimated that approximately 85% of children attending alternative provision will have SLCN. All can benefit from universal SLCN support strategies.
Evidence-informed practice	To remove barriers for those with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), a whole-school universal approach was developed with a referral pathway for those with more complex needs. The universal approach was developed through continuing professional development for staff (CPD), evaluation of staff confidence, and learning walks. The development of a referral pathway includes the use of the Communication Trust's progression tool.

RESEARCH TIMELINE

Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July
Action Research Cycle 1 Step 1: Establish the research focus	**Action Research Cycle 1** Step 2: Study Steps 3-5: Plan 1			Step 6: Do 1 Steps 7-8: Review 1 **Action Research Cycle 2** Step 9: Study 2 Steps 10-12: Plan 2 Step 13: Do 2 Step 14-15: Review 2				Share and disseminate the research (anonymised) with other interested parties.		

ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE 1

RESEARCH FOCUS: Step 1

Initial research interest aim/question (Step 1)	How can we best screen for speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) as part of a baseline of assessment? **Research aim:** to explore the importance of addressing SLCN in our Alternative Provision setting and to evaluate the effectiveness of a whole school approach to SLCN support. This research aims to identify the best practice for supporting students with SLCN in our school, to improve our students' educational and social outcomes.

KEY LITERATURE SHAPING THE RESEARCH (STUDY 1): Step 2

Reference	Birmingham City Council (2020). *SLCN Screening Process*. Local Offer Birmingham. https://www.localofferbirmingham.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/SLCN-Screening-Poster-A3.pdf Department for Education/ (2023). *Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) Improvement Plan.* https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-and-alternative-provision-improvement-plan Freeman, K. (2023). *How does the new SEND and AP improvement plan link with supporting speech and language in schools.* Speech and Language in education. https://speechandlanguage.link/resources/how-does-the-new-send-and-ap-improvement-plan-link-with-supporting-speech-and-language-in-schools/ Gross, J. (2020). *Closing the gap: learning from five areas who have gained ground.* Early Intervention Foundation. https://www.eif.org.uk/blog/closing-the-word-gap-learning-from-five-areas-who-have-gained-ground Law, J., Rush, R., Schoon, I., & Parsons, S. (2009). Modeling Developmental Language Difficulties From School Entry Into Adulthood: Literacy, Mental Health, and Employment Outcomes. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, *52*(6), 1401–1416. https://doi.org/10.1044/1092-4388(2009/08-0142) Leyden, J., Stackhouse, J., & Szczerbinski, M. (2011). Implementing a whole school approach to support speech, language and communication: Perceptions of key staff. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, *27*(2), 203-222. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265659011398375 Mustoe-Playfair, S., & Bingham, L. (2020). *The Ultimate Guide to SLCN.* SpeechLink Multimedia Limited. Public Health England. (2020). *Best start in speech, language and communication: Supporting evidence*. Department for Education and Department for Health & Social Care. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5f9be9c48fa8f57f3b4cb075/BSSLC_Supporting-evidence.pdf Schools Wellbeing Partnership. (n.d.). *Why have a whole school approach? https://schoolswellbeing.org.uk/whole-school/why-have-whole-school-*

	approach#:~:text=In%20a%20nutshell%2C%20the%20benefits,Improved%20academic%20learning. Speech and Language UK. (n.d.) *Primary Talk: A training programme to help develop the communication skills of children aged children aged 4-11.* https://speechandlanguage.org.uk/educators-and-professionals/programmes-for-nurseries-and-schools/primary-talk/ The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists. (2018). *Written evidence submitted by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists.* https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/82380/pdf/
Key point(s) of note	**Summary** - There is a significant impact of SLCN on students' learning, socialisation and mental health in Alternative Provision (AP). - There is a necessity for early identification and tailored interventions for effective support. - There are benefits to having a whole school approach to create an inclusive communication rich environment. - It is critical to address SLCN to mitigate the risk of exclusion and ensure equitable educational opportunities for all students. Identifying SLCN is vital for several reasons, each contributing to the overall development and well-being of young people (HM Government, 2023). Reasons why SLCN identification is important: 1. Early Intervention and Support a. Early identification of SLCN allows for timely intervention, which is critical for effectiveness. The earlier the support is provided, the better the outcomes in terms of language development, social skills, and academic achievement. b. Interventions can be tailored to meet the specific needs of the individual, helping to mitigate potential long-term impacts on children's communication abilities. 2. Academic Achievement a. Language and communication skills are foundational to learning. Children with unidentified SLCN may find reading, writing, and overall academic performance more difficult. b. Addressing SLCN early ensures that children can access the curriculum more effectively, participate better in classroom activities, and achieve their academic potential. 3. Social and Emotional Development (RCSLT, 2018) a. Communication is key to forming relationships and participating in social interactions. Children with SLCN might experience difficulties in making friends and engaging in social activities. b. Early identification and support can improve a child's ability to interact with peers (Gross, 2020), reducing the risk of social isolation and associated emotional difficulties (RCSLT, 2018). 4. Behavioural Outcomes (RCSLT, 2018)

a. Unaddressed SLCN can lead to frustration and behavioural issues. Children who cannot express themselves adequately might present with challenging behaviour or withdraw.
b. Good support can help in developing effective communication strategies, leading to better behaviour management and reduced incidences of behavioural problems.

5. Family and Caregiver Support (RCSLT, 2018)
   a. Identifying SLCN helps families and caregivers understand the challenges their child faces and equips them with strategies to support their child's development.
   b. It fosters a collaborative approach between professionals and families, creating a supportive environment for the child's growth.

6. Long-term Benefits (Public Health England, 2020)
   a. Effective early intervention and support for SLCN contributes to better long-term outcomes in terms of employment opportunities, independence, and overall quality of life.
   b. Adults with well-managed SLCN are more likely to lead successful, fulfilling lives.

In conclusion, identifying SLCN is essential because it enables targeted interventions that support the individual's educational, social, emotional, and behavioural development (RCSLT, 2018). Helping young people to communicate effectively lays the foundation for better lifelong outcomes (Public Health England, 2020).

Why is SLCN important in alternative provision?
Speech, language, and communication needs (SLCN) are paramount in alternative provision (AP) due to their profound impact on students' learning, socialisation, and communication skills (Freeman, 2023).

HM Government, 2023
The English government's SEND and AP Improvement Plan recognises the challenges schools face in supporting pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), including SLCN. Over 50% of children entering primary school experience delays in their speech, language, and communication skills, with 8% diagnosed with Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) and 10% facing long-term SLCN throughout their school lives. These statistics underscore the significant proportion of school children grappling with SLCN, which can lead to long-term issues such as poor academic performance, low self-esteem, and mental health concerns. Early identification and evidence-based interventions are crucial to address SLCN effectively, as emphasised by the Improvement Plan.

Strong SLC abilities can enhance comprehension, engagement, and academic achievement.

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, 2018
There is a concerning link between communication needs and school exclusion, with 81% of children identified as having emotional and behavioural difficulties

	also experiencing significant language challenges. Early identification and support for SLCN could mitigate the risk of exclusion from school. In AP, the significance of SLCN is further underscored by the link between socially disadvantaged areas and delayed language development. Children from economically deprived backgrounds are more likely to experience delayed language development and other SLC challenges, with over 50% starting school with delayed language development and identified SLCN. In AP, where students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds may be overrepresented, addressing speech, language, and communication needs becomes even more critical. Targeted interventions are essential to address the unique challenges faced by these students and ensure equitable access to education. In summary, addressing SLCN in AP is imperative for ensuring positive educational outcomes and holistic development for all students. Effective support and interventions are crucial to mitigate the long-term consequences of SLCN and foster an inclusive learning environment where every student can thrive. **How to develop a screening process for speech, language, and communication needs (SLCN)?** **<u>Mustoe-Playfair & Bingham, 2020</u>** An audit tool and a communication-friendly school checklist could support schools to identify areas of strength and areas needing development. It is important to have a written policy outlining systems in place to identify and support children with SLCN. This should be shared with all staff and updated in line with training and current practices, and linked, where relevant, to an action plan. Universal Screening tools for all students can be quick and simple checklists or questionnaires filled out by teachers. Data collection and analysis: collect data from surveys and track progress. Identify students with low scores or who may be presenting with potential communication difficulties. Implement whole school strategies for all learners: visual supports, multisensory learning, focus on reading, breaking down key terms, etc. **Birmingham City Council, 2020** The screening process for SLCN refers to a systematic approach to identifying individuals (particularly young people) who may have difficulties with SLCN. An effective screening process can facilitate timely and appropriate interventions that support developmental outcomes. Screening: - Allows for accurate identification of students who need additional support. - Appropriately targeted early intervention can increase attainment because language underpins all learning. - Leads to mental health and wellbeing benefits through effective provision for SLCN.

	Developing an effective screening process involves several key steps, both at a whole school and individualised level. 1. Define objectives and outcomes: clearly outline the goals of the screening process. Identify what you aim to achieve. *a. For Solihull Academy, this includes early detection of SLCN, ensuring timely intervention and supporting educational and social development.* 2. Whole School Screening. a. Continuous awareness training for all staff (teachers, leadership, support staff) to recognise signs of SLCN (including difficulties in understanding spoken language, expressing themselves clearly, social communication and literacy skills. 3. Individualised Assessment a. Referral process: develop a clear referral process within the school for students needing further assessment, for example, teachers and support staff referring students to a designated lead with expertise on SLCN (Birmingham City Council, 2020). b. Speech and Language Therapists (SALTs): collaborate with external SALT services or have a qualified SaLT on staff. They can conduct in-depth assessments to diagnose specific SLCN (Mustoe-Playfair & Bingham, 2020). c. Individualised Education Plans: Based on assessments, outline specific goals, interventions and support strategies for each student with SLCN, which can be accessed by all staff (Mustoe-Playfair & Bingham, 2020). *At Solihull Academy, this could be done through Individualised Personalised Plans.* d. Develop in school interventions: 1-1, paired and group interventions, language targets modelled through class activity and activities shared with families. 4. Ongoing monitoring a. Regularly monitor student progress and adjust interventions as needed (Birmingham City Council, 2020). b. The school must develop a clear way of monitoring and evaluating progress for pupils with SLCN (Mustoe-Playfair & Bingham, 2020). c. This could include carrying out regular classroom observations of 'learning walks' to ensure high-quality teaching strategies and differentiation are in place. This must be structured to measure the effectiveness of differentiated work and interventions for pupils with SLCN (Mustoe-Playfair & Bingham, 2020). 5. Additional considerations *a.* Communication-friendly environment: adapt a school environment to be communication-friendly. This includes visuals, clear routines and noise reduction strategies (Mustoe-Playfair & Bingham, 2020). *b.* Parental Involvement: work collaboratively with parents/guardians. Inform them about SLCN, the screening process and available support (Mustoe-Playfair & Bingham, 2020). **Is a whole school approach to speech, language, communication needs (SLCN) better than an identification pathway?**

	Leyden & Stackhouse, 2011 Language has a crucial role in developing literacy skills, learning, emotional and social development. Recognition of the importance of a whole school approach (WSA) to support the development of SLCN for all children. Whole school approaches help to remove barriers to effective provision for children with SLCN. These barriers include: lack of awareness of language development, late identification of children with SLCN, limited collaboration between health and education staff and poor integration of communication-focused work into the curriculum. WSA is well worth implementing if there are appropriate resources to ensure that there is sufficient dedicated time and that all key staff are involved. The success of WSA is dependent on a shared belief that SLCN is core to the curriculum at any age and important for all children, not just those with SLCN. The backing of senior staff and specialist support for coordinators is essential. Ideally, this support should come from staff who are more experienced or 'specialist' than the coordinators themselves. Primary Talk[1] is an example of a whole school approach. It is an inclusive, whole school training and accreditation programme which aims to: - Provide communication-rich environments for all children - Increase knowledge of the development of SLCN - Enable school staff to identify children with SLCN and provide targeted intervention where indicated At the centre of the programme is effective collaboration with the speech and language therapy (SLT) service and other support agencies. This includes both teaching and non-teaching staff. **School's Wellbeing Partnership, 2024** A whole school approach (WSA) involves all parts of the school working together and being committed, including senior leaders, teachers and all school staff. WSA offers: - improved pupil wellbeing - improved staff wellbeing and retention - improved academic learning - strong links to improving schools' overall effectiveness - development of social and emotional skills - prevention of MH problems - improved school behaviour - reduction in fights, bullying, exclusions and absence Out of 207 social and emotional interventions, schools with effective wellbeing programmes showed an 11% improvement in achievement tests, a 25% improvement in social and emotional skills, and a 10% decrease in classroom misbehaviour, anxiety and depression.

[1] Speech and Language UK. (n.d.). *Primary Talk: A training programme to help develop the communication skills of children aged children aged 4-11.* https://speechandlanguage.org.uk/educators-and-professionals/programmes-for-nurseries-and-schools/primary-talk/

PLAN 1: Step 3

As part of the process of planning Action Research Cycle 1 and having completed the 'study' phase, the research question can evolve and become further refined.

Revised research question	How can we best provide for children with identified and unidentified SLCN within an alternative provision?

PLAN 1 and DO 1: Steps 4 and 6

Methods of data collection

1. Ofsted report review

The most recent Ofsted report at Solihull Academy served as a key resource, providing a detailed assessment of the current state of SLCN in our school and highlighting specific areas requiring improvement. The report was reviewed, and relevant details were noted.

2. Learning walks

Clear objectives, focused on SLCN, were established. For example, looking for the use of specific strategies, the accessibility of language in classroom materials, or the engagement levels of students with SLCN.

A checklist based on best practices of SLCN support was used on the learning walks. Including items such as the use of visual aids, the presence of differentiated instructions, interaction patterns, and the use of assistive technology.

Notes were taken of examples of good practice as well as areas needing improvement.

Learning walks took place regularly over a period of three months to monitor ongoing practices and progress, helping to identify trends and ensuring that any changes made are sustained over time.

Learning walks included teachers across subject areas and support staff, including teaching assistants.

3. Observation

Observations were conducted in a systematic and structured manner with a focus on the support for SLCN within our school.

The primary objectives of the observations were to assess the current strategies used to support SLCN, identify best practice and pinpoint areas needing improvement.

Observations included classroom visits to see how SLCN strategies were being implemented, with each observation lasting between 30-60 minutes. Detailed notes were made during observations and structured checklists were filled out.

Special attention was given to how students with SLCN engaged with the lesson content, interacted with peers and teachers and utilised support tools.

Observations took place across various classrooms, social areas, and support spaces within the school.

4. Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were also conducted to explore perceptions and experiences of individuals (teachers, students, parents, specialists) regarding the current state of SLCN support within our school.

Using open-ended questions, interviews aimed to explore the specific challenges faced by our teachers in implementing SLCN strategies effectively, as well as instances of successful support that can serve as models for improvement. Themes explored included:

- experiences with current SLCN support methods
- perceived effectiveness of interventions
- challenges encountered
- suggestions for enhancement

These interviews were conducted in school over two months with a range of participants:

- 6 teachers (3 English, 2 maths, 1 science)
- 5 students with varying SLCN
- 4 parents of students with SLCN
- 1 SLCN specialist

5. Whole staff progress questionnaire

To monitor ongoing progress and areas for improvement, a whole staff questionnaire was administered to assess staff confidence with their knowledge and understanding of SLCN and how they can best support our students.

PLAN 2: Step 5

Ethical consent was sought from each participant to publish this data anonymously.

REVIEW 1: Step 7-8

Data Analysis: process

1. Observation notes, interview notes, questionnaire responses and written feedback were transcribed and organised systematically.
2. Data was categorised based on recurring themes, patterns and concepts. Key insights and issues related to SLCN within our school have been identified.
3. Data from the different data collection methods was then compared and cross-referenced.
4. Based on the interpreted data, conclusions were drawn regarding the effectiveness of current SLCN support practices within our school. Common strengths, weaknesses, areas for improvement and potential implications for practice were identified.

Summary of Findings

Research Question:

How can we best provide for children with identified and unidentified SLCN within an alternative provision?

- The literature review demonstrated the value of a whole school approach, with the necessity for a clear referral pathway for students with high SLCN. The research also demonstrated the high prevalence and need for support within our alternative provision setting.
- The Ofsted report identified that current staff confidence in supporting SLCN was an area of improvement for our school.
- Learning walks showed a solid basis of good practice. However, there was too much assumed knowledge and understanding of a problem. For example, lots of students can read the words in a book without processing or understanding them. There was little evidence of dual coding and ensuring a deeper understanding of both tasks and texts. There was some use of basic keywords, but these were not always revisited and secured.

Analysis and next steps leading into Action Research Cycle 2

- A whole school approach to address SLCN in our school, including a clear referral pathway for students with high SLCN, is needed to ensure they receive the necessary support.

- Ofsted report highlights the lack of confidence among current staff in supporting students with SLCN, demonstrating the need for professional development and training programmes to equip staff with the skills and knowledge required to support these students effectively.
- Observations and learning walks reveal an over-reliance on assumed knowledge, indicating the need for teaching strategies that emphasise deeper understanding and processing of information.
- There is little evidence of dual coding[2] (using both visual and verbal information) and reinforcing key concepts. To enhance student comprehension, it is important for us to incorporate these techniques consistently and revisit key words and concepts to ensure they are fully understood and retained.

Overall, our findings suggest that while there are strong elements in place, our school needs to focus on improving staff confidence and capability in supporting SLCN, adopting a whole school approach, and implementing more effective teaching strategies to ensure deeper understanding and retention of material.

Next Step(s): Action Research Cycle 2
- Continued learning walks to assess and monitor progress.
- Input from special educational needs and disability coordinator (SENCO) and Teaching and Learning lead.
- Online SLCN training for all staff.
- Training from a Speech and Language therapist.
- SEN department referral pathway to utilise the Speech and Language Communication progression tool.
- All staff questionnaire to monitor confidence and progress.

ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE 2

KEY LITERATURE SHAPING THE RESEARCH (STUDY 2): Step 9

Reference	No further literature was drawn upon

PLAN 2: Step 10

Revised research question	Following the completion of Action Research cycle 1, the researchers continued to explore the original question further; thus, no revisions to the original research question were needed for Action Research cycle 2.

PLAN 2 and DO 2: Steps 11 and 13

Methods of data collection
1. Continued learning walks to assess and monitor progress.
2. Input from SENCO and Teaching and Learning lead.
3. Online SLCN training for all staff.
4. Speech and Language therapist training.
5. SEN department referral pathway to utilise the Speech and Language Communication progression tool.
6. All staff questionnaire to monitor confidence and progress.

[2] Times Education Supplement (TES) Explains & Education Endowment Foundation. (2025). *What is dual coding?* https://www.tes.com/magazine/tes-explains/what-dual-coding

Description of research sample, timing and location
Learning walks, training and a questionnaire were completed by/for all staff across all departments.

PLAN 2: Step 12
Ethical consent was sought from each participant to publish this data anonymously.

REVIEW 2: Steps 14-15

Data Analysis: process

1. Learning walk observation notes were compared to the previous notes to identify any continued areas of improvement needed and any improvements in SLCN practices across the school.
2. Meeting notes (from SENCO and Teaching and Learning lead) were obtained and used as a reference point to implement changes into teaching practices across the school.
3. Feedback forms were filled out following the training to establish how useful staff found the training; the results of these were then analysed.
4. All staff questionnaires were to represent the overall confidence of staff following the changes implemented.

Summary of Findings

Action Research Cycle 2, Research Question:
How can we best provide for children with identified and unidentified SLCN within an alternative provision?

- Staff are developing different personalised strategies to address SLCN. We are happy for this to look different in each curriculum area but would like common practices around discussion and thorough understanding of key words and contexts.
- SENCO and Teaching and Learning Lead sourced specialists to provide training to staff, and we developed an SLCN prompt sheet.
- Teaching and Learning lead is developing learning maps to scaffold personalised SLCN support in lessons.
  Learning maps are designed to assist staff members in the classroom to develop learning and language, to facilitate conversations and explore the pupils' understanding of the tasks which need to be completed; see
  Appendix 5 – Learning **Maps**.
- Online training was useful; however, the practical applications from session 2 of SLCN training were found more valuable to staff, providing staff with resources, prompts and activities that they could use in lessons.
- The referral form has been developed, and the Communication Trust progression tool purchased. To be used as part of the September inset day training.
- Staff feel more knowledgeable, but the consistency of provision is lacking in some areas.

Results of all staff questionnaire (results in Appendix B):

Key points and recurrent themes
- **Need for practical and ongoing training:** staff desire more practical advice, ongoing training, and specific examples.
- **Consistency across the school:** whole school approach and consistent strategies are essential.
- **Resource and support sharing**: sharing resources and strategies among staff.
- **Effective identification and intervention**: early identification of SLCN and targeted interventions are critical.

- **Support for Teaching Assistants**: more training for TAs to effectively support SLCN.
- **Regular updates and personal development plans**: keeping SLCN at the forefront with regular updates and tailored plans for students.
- **Dedicated resources and staff:** need for more resources and possibly dedicated or specially trained staff.

Analysis and next steps leading into conclusion(s)

- Staff to use training resources in lessons.
- Staff to experiment with learning strategies in lessons.
- Support staff to explore pupils' understanding of language and instructions through targeted questioning.
- Staff encouraged to use the prompt sheet provided.

Initiatives Based on Staff Responses to Enhance SLCN Support

- Teaching Assistant (TA) Toolkit for upskilling teaching assistants based on the response for more training for TAs.
  - Designed to educate and train TAs on effectively supporting students with SLCN.
  - Includes practical strategies, examples, and training modules tailored to TA support.
- See Appendix 4 **– Special Educational Needs (SEN) Toolkit**

SLCN Resource Book based on the request for more resources, ongoing training and a whole school approach (see Appendix 3 **– Speech Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) Handbook**).

- Created to address the request for more resources.
- Focuses on identifying SLCN and providing strategies to support these students.
- Contains comprehensive information on SLCN signs and intervention techniques.

Practical Advice Flow Chart designed

- Developed in response to the need for practical advice and support across different subjects.
- Breaks down steps and strategies for staff to support SLCN within their lessons.
- Provides clear, actionable guidance for various classroom scenarios.
- See Appendix 3a **– Flow Chart, 'A student is struggling in the classroom'**

Clear Referral Pathway

- Integrated within the SLCN booklet to guide staff concerned about a student's SLCN.
- Outlines the steps and procedures for referring students for further assessment and support.
- Ensures a streamlined process for identifying and addressing SLCN needs.
- See Appendix 3b **– Referral Pathway, 'Steps to take if you are concerned about a student's SLCN**

Whole School Approach via SLCN Checklist:

- Designed to foster a consistent, whole-school approach to supporting SLCN.
- Included in the SLCN booklet to ensure all staff follow a unified protocol.
- Helps in monitoring and ensuring comprehensive SLCN support across the school.
- See Appendix 3c **– Whole School Approach via SLCN Checklist - 'SLCN Checklist'**

Sharing Successful Strategies through individual pupil profiles (IPPs):

- Emphasised within the referral pathway section of the SLCN booklet (Appendix 3b **– Referral Pathway, 'Steps to take if you are concerned about a student's SLCN**.
- Encourages staff to document and share effective strategies on students' Individual Personal Plans (IPPs).
- Promotes the dissemination of tried and tested methods among staff to enhance SLCN support.

CONCLUSION

Research aim/question
How can we best provide for children with identified and unidentified SLCN within an alternative provision?
Conclusion(s) Ofsted correctly identified a weakness in provision for SLCN. However, the report focused on the clear identification of SLCN. Further to this, the action research project highlighted a need to ensure all students' SLCN are effectively met within the universal provision and quality first teaching. Once this is established, a referral pathway is needed for students who need further support. SENCO will lead on the referral pathway as teachers identify need. The Communication Trust Progression Tool will be used to indicate the level of need and frame the next steps, which may include the use of Communication and Learning Difficulties (CLD) hours or specialist provision. The school improvement plan and learning walks will be used to ensure SLCN remains a priority.
Next Steps
- Continued learning walks to monitor the implementation of SLCN practices and staff confidence. - Empower staff to utilise the referral pathway for those identified as needing additional support. - Designated SLCN staff member within the school. - Continued staff training. - Regular updates and feedback.

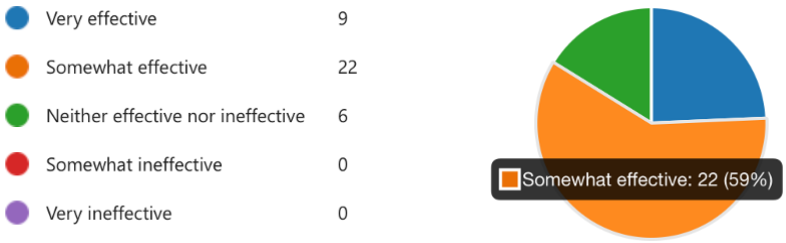
Appendix 1 – Action Research Cycles

Action Research Cycle 1	**Establish the research focus**	**Step 1:** Identify the ISEND area for development which requires research.
	Study 1	**Step 2:** Review the research literature.
	Plan 1	**First Plan**
		Step 3: Start the process of refining the research.
		Step 4: Decide what kind of direction you are going to take (direct or enquiry).
		Step 5: Consider research ethics (engage with the ethics checklist).
	Do 1	**Step 6:** Implement the first plan (either direct action or enquiry as action).
	Review 1	**Step 7:** Review and Reflect.
		Step 8: Analyse the meaning of the data gathered.
Action Research Cycle 2	**Study 2**	**Step 9:** Review further literature if required.
	Plan 2	**Second Plan**
		Step 10: Based on the 'reflect' phase, refine the research (this may involve revising or developing the research questions) and plan the next actions.
		Step 11: Decide what kind of action you are going to take (direct or enquiry).
		Step 12: Seek any further ethical permissions if needed (engage with ethics checklist).
	Do 2	**Step 13:** Implement the second plan – (either direct action or enquiry as action).
	Review 2	**Step 14:** Review and reflect.
		Step 15: Analyse the meaning of the data gathered.

Appendix 2 – Questionnaire Responses
Microsoft Forms results: Staff confidence in SLCN

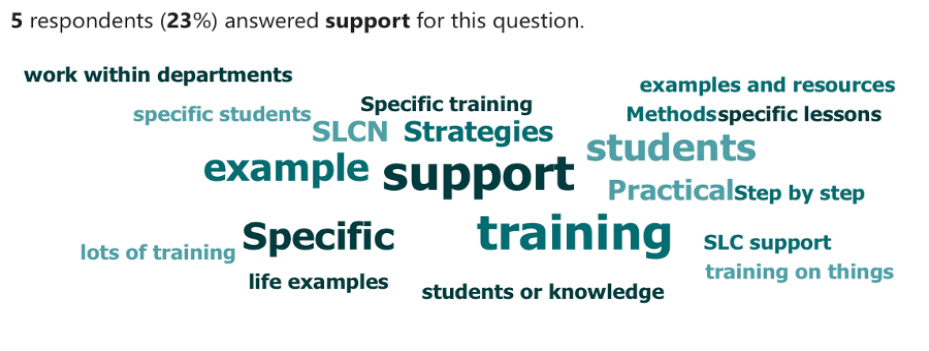
Staff Training on SLCN

- **Attendance**: 86% of staff attended the all-staff SLCN training.
- **Effectiveness**:
  - 24% found it 'very effective'.
  - 59% found it 'somewhat effective'.
  - 16% found it 'neither effective nor ineffective'



Additional Training Needs
Staff indicated several areas where additional training would be beneficial:

1. **Practical Advice**: Specific advice on in-class applications and strategies.
2. **Interventions**: Ideas for interventions that encourage communication.
3. **Phonics Training**: Specific phonics training.
4. **Cross-Department SLCN Work**: Strategies and examples for different lessons.
5. **Resource Sharing**: Sharing good practice among staff.
6. **Case Studies**: Examples and advice on supporting students within the specific school setting.
7. **Ongoing Training**: Regular updates and practical examples.
8. **Whole School Approach**: Consistent strategies across the school.
9. **Referral Pathways**: Clear referral pathways and information on screening tools.



Confidence in Applying SLCN Training

Planning and Meeting SLCN Needs:

- 70% feel confident.
- 27% are 'not so confident'.

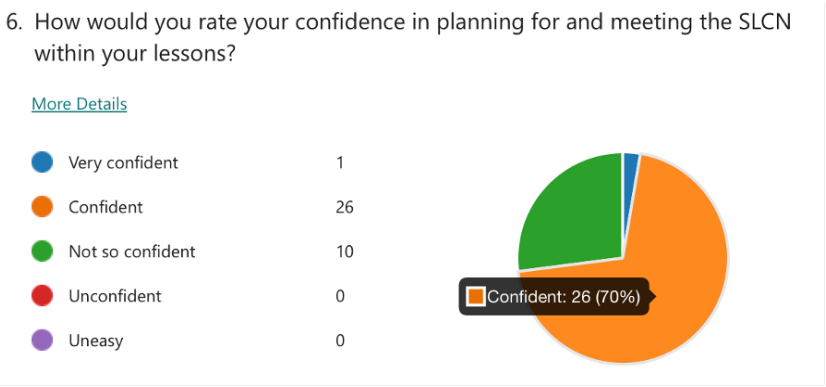
Identifying Students with SLCN:

- 73% feel confident.
- 27% are unsure.
- 0% do not feel confident.

Meeting SLCN Needs in Classroom:

- 68% feel they can 'somewhat effectively' meet needs.

- 24% feel ‘neither effectively nor ineffectively’.



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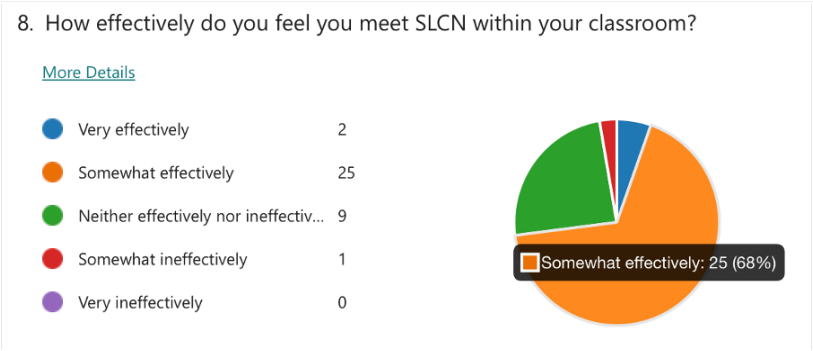
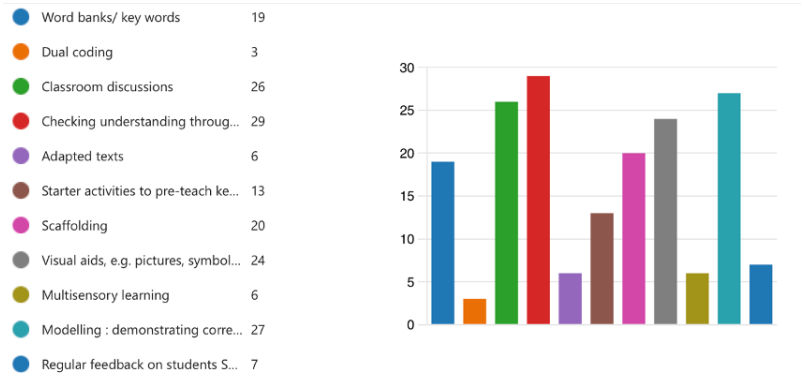


Most common strategies used to meet SLCN within the classroom…

- Checking understanding through targeted questions (29 selected)
- Modelling (27 selected)
- Classroom discussions (26 selected)
- Visual aids (24 selected)
- Scaffolding (20 selected)
- Word banks/ key words (19 selected)
- Starter activities to pre-teach vocab (13 selected)
- Regular feedback (7 selected)
- Multisensory learning (6 selected)
- Adapted texts (6 selected)
- Dual coding (3 selected)



Challenges in Supporting Students with SLCN

- Lack of a consistent whole school approach.
- Understanding and supporting individual needs.
- Insufficient resources.

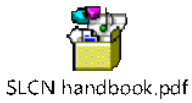
- Difficulty in getting the correct support for students.
- Students masking SLCN through behaviour.
- Lack of training for Teaching Assistants.
- Late identification of SLCN needs.

Suggestions from staff for improving support for students with SLCN…

1. **Consistent Whole School Approach**: Embedding consistent strategies.
2. **Resource Sharing**: Sharing effective strategies among staff.
3. **Vocabulary Rich Lessons**: Encouraging exploration of new words.
4. **Effective Screening**: Identifying SLCN on school entry.
5. **Visual Aids and Displays**: Enhancing classroom environments.
6. **Learning Maps**: Subject-specific key information.
7. **TA Training**: More training for Teaching Assistants.
8. **Awareness of SLCN**: Staff awareness of SLCN students.
9. **Modelling Communication**: Correct forms of communication in all interactions.
10. **Targeted Interventions**: Specific interventions for SLCN.
11. **Personal Development Plans**: Individual plans for students.
12. **Regular Updates**: Keeping SLCN as a priority.
13. **Additional Resources**: Increasing available resources.
14. **Dedicated SLCN Staff Member**: Having specialist staff or training some within the school.

Appendix 3 – Speech Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) Handbook

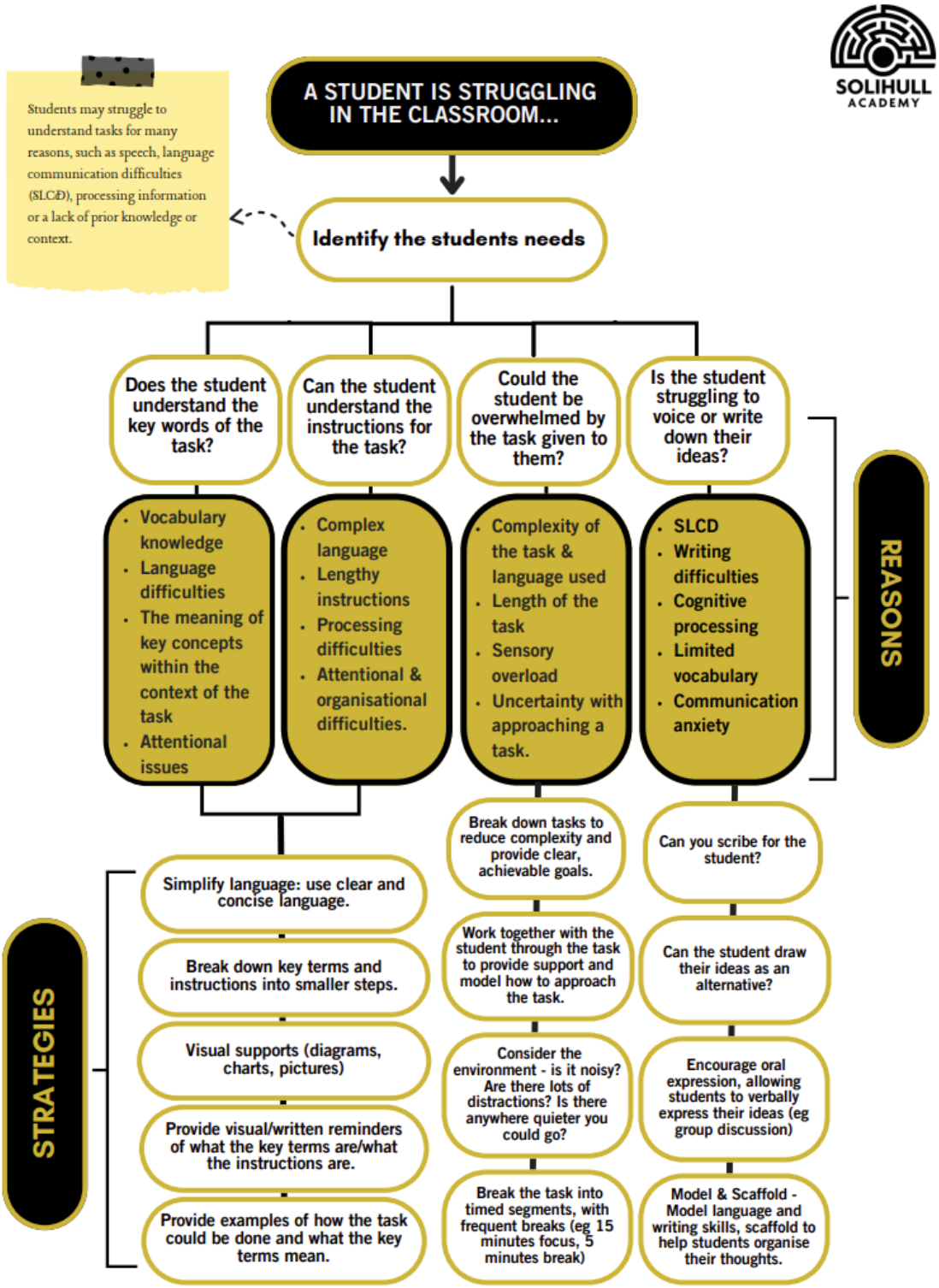
You can access this resource via the link below, or by searching the Camtree Digital Library for the title 'Speech, Language and Communication: Universal and targeted approach'.



A few screenshots from the resource are provided below.

Appendix 3a – Flow Chart, 'A student is struggling in the classroom'

Taken from the 'Speech Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) Handbook', page 15.



Appendix 3b – Referral Pathway, 'Steps to take if you are concerned about a student's SLCN
Taken from the 'Speech Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) Handbook', page 5.

Steps to take if you are concerned about a students SLCN...

1. Observe the student in different settings and note any specific behaviours, difficulties and examples of speech and communication challenges.
2. Talk to our SENCO (Lee Nolan) about your concerns. Find out if the child is currently or has previously been known to your local SaLT service or other professionals.
3. If the child has been known to SaLT, read their latest report and implement any recommendations.
4. If the student is not known to have SLCN, the SENCO may refer the student to external services. During this time, implement SLCN strategies in the classroom and monitor any progress the student makes.
5. If you find any strategies which work specifically well for this student, document your findings on the students IPP and communicate these strategies with other staff members.
6. Regularly monitor and review the students progress and adjust support as necessary, maintain communication with the student, their parents/guardians, the school SENCO and other staff supporting the student.

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Appendix 3c – Whole School Approach via SLCN Checklist - 'SLCN Checklist'
Taken from the 'Speech Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) Handbook', page 16.

SLCN CHECKLIST

PREPARING THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT:

- ◯ Ensure the classroom is visually organised and free from distractions
- ◯ Provide visual schedules of the lesson and clear instructions for activities and tasks
- ◯ Display visual aids, such as key words, word walls and picture cards, to support understanding and communication
- ◯ Plan on opportunities to repeat key words and information throughout

PLANNING INSTRUCTION:

- ◯ Identify and pre-teach key vocabulary using visual supports and simplified language
- ◯ Break down tasks into smaller, manageable steps, and provide clear instructions with visual cues.
- ◯ Scaffold learning by providing structured support, such as models, prompts, and guided practice.
- ◯ Write key words on the board

FACILITATING COMMUNICATION:

- ◯ Speak slowly and clearly, using simple language and visual aids to support understanding
- ◯ Model appropriate communication strategies, such as turn taking and active listening
- ◯ Encourage students to use alternative communication methods, such as gestures or picture symbols
- ◯ Provide opportunities for students to practice communication skills in structured and supportive settings

MONITORING PROGRESS & PROVIDING FEEDBACK:

- ◯ Specific and constructive feedback on communication efforts, focusing on strengths and areas for growth
- ◯ Adjust instruction and support based on students needs and progress
- ◯ Celebrate successes and efforts

COLLABORATING WITH SUPPORT STAFF & FAMILIES :

- ◯ Collaborate with other staff members to develop and implement individualised communication goals
- ◯ Communicate regularly with families to share progress, and strategies for support and reinforce learning at home.

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Appendix 4 – Special Educational Needs (SEN) Toolkit

You can access this resource via the link below, or by searching the Camtree Digital Library for the title 'Speech, Language and Communication: Universal and targeted approach'.

TA toolkit.pdf

Appendix 5 – Learning Maps

Slide 1

Learning Maps

This PowerPoint contains some examples of learning maps from Louise, Linda and Pamela– who have been trialling a variety of approaches. Please feel free to use these templates and adapt to suit your teaching.

Slide 2

What are Learning Maps?

- Clear **aspirations** for success each lesson
- We plan for a good day
- Plan for doing AND thinking
- Meaningful for students who can see their success and progress
- Informative for any classroom support (TA, AHOY, support etc.)

Essentially – a guide to the lesson that could be used with minimal handover for a breakout/1:1 as well as providing students with clear academic expectations.

Slide 3

Key Criteria for Successful Learning Maps

- Starter/Do now!
- Main learning objective
- Key vocabulary
- Flexible learning space
- Dual coding

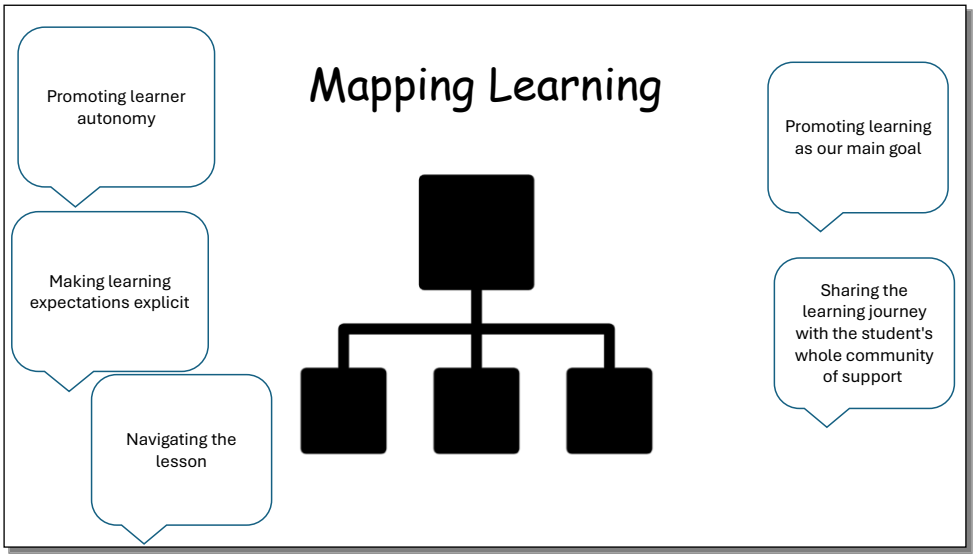
It is an expectation that learning maps are used in all classroom based lessons.
We have trialled this approach and have seen an improvement in engagement where they have been used.

Slide 4

Helpful Hints

- You do not have to use a different learning map for each student – at times it is appropriate for the class to be completing the same tasks.
- At other times it will be useful to have adapted learning maps based on ability, previous knowledge etc.
- You may choose to have a learning map that covers a short sequence of lessons or a short topic – please be mindful of cognitive load and the risk of overwhelming students.
- Keeping a blank space allows teachers and TAs to adapt the lesson in the moment.
- It is up to you whether you stick them in or bin them after each lesson!
- Talk to TAs about how learning maps are working – they will have valuable insights for you!

Slide 5



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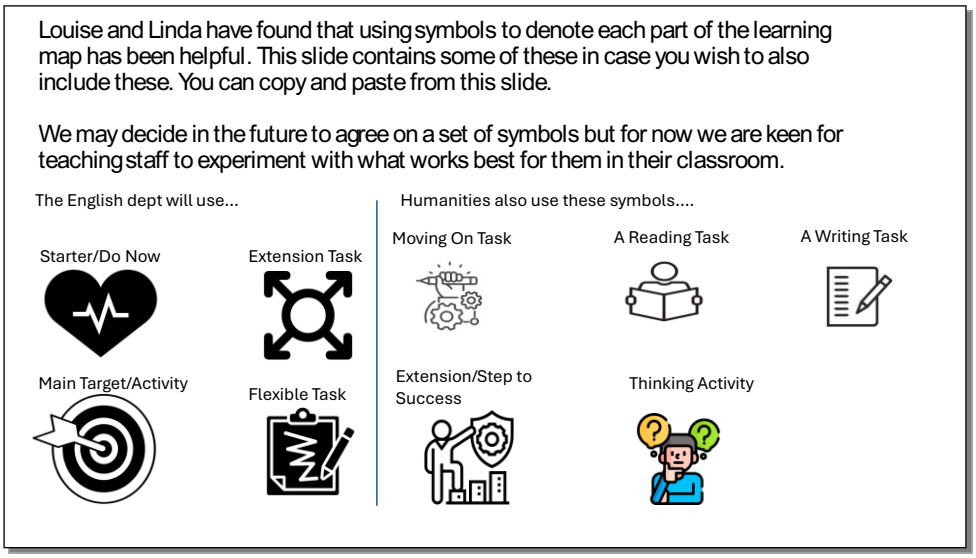


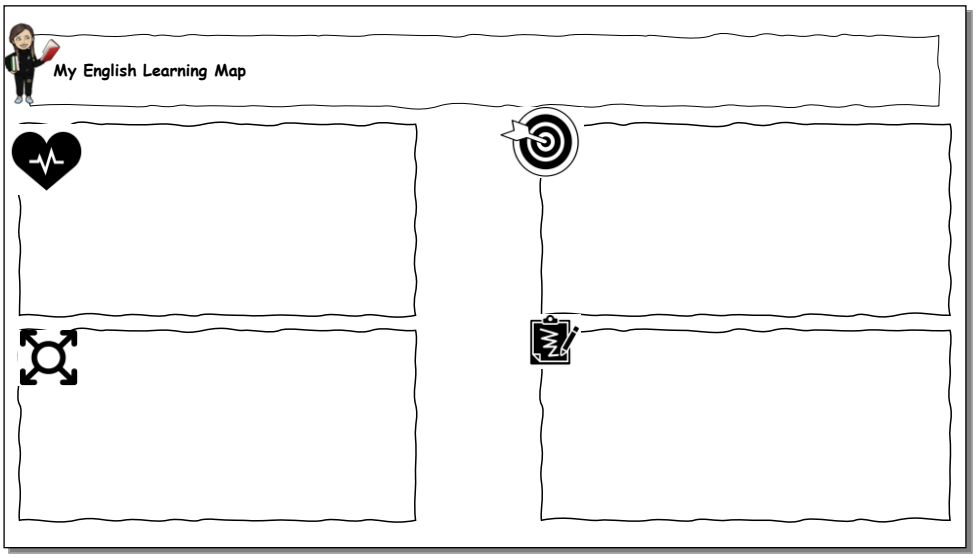
Slide 7

Example Templates – if you would like further advice please talk to Linda, Louise or Pamela.

There are templates from the summer term trial in the shared area/ Teaching and Learning folder. You may wish to look at these as well.

We are keen for teachers to find an approach that works for them and we recognise that we are still learning and adapting.

Slide 8



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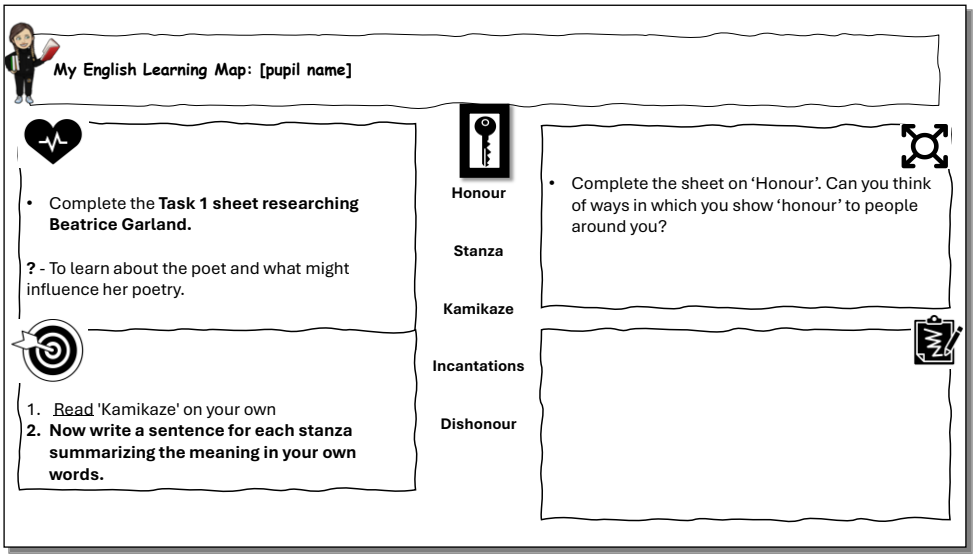

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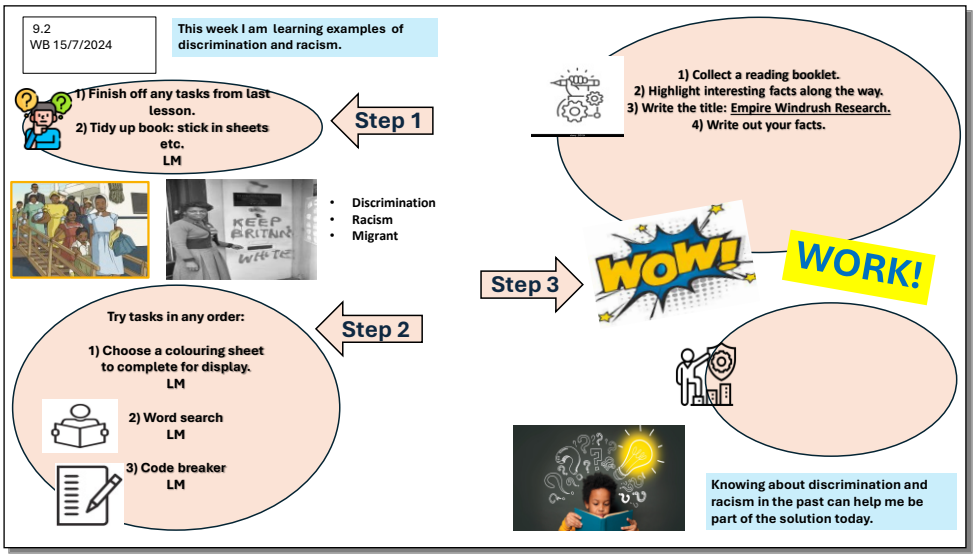

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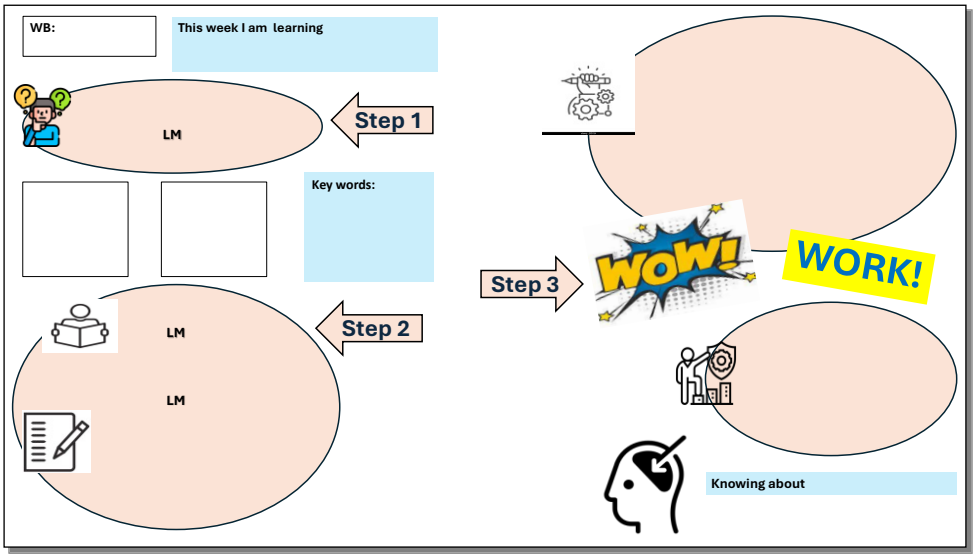

Slide 12