

Report on Speech Language and Communication Support in Cardiff
Speech Language and Communication Needs - Reference Group
2016-17

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1. Background to this report

In 2015-16 the Council formally proposed phasing out specialist provision for children with specific language impairments. This was in response to a number of changes in ways of supporting speech and language needs, and a fall in demand for specialist places.

Cardiff Council and Cardiff and the Vale University Health Board (CVUHB) Children's Speech and Language Therapy Service have developed a collaborative approach to identify and support speech language and communication needs, including a comprehensive training and support programme for mainstream schools. The collaboration has its roots in the Speech and Language Service Pilots, funded by the Welsh Government from 2005-2008. Cardiff Council and CVUHB joined the pilot in 2006-08.

Between 2010 and 2015, the collective pupil roll at Meadowbank and Allensbank fell from 58 to 34. Numbers at Allensbank had fallen from 18 in 2010 to 11 in 2015, while places at Meadowbank had fallen from 40 in 2010, to 23 in 2015. The fall in the places at Meadowbank was partly caused by the

Vale of Glamorgan Council's decision, in 2010, to cease funding 10 places at the school for Vale children.

The Council suggested that the successful implementation of the collaborative model accounts for the fall in demand for specialist provision, and the proposal to close both the special school and the SRB was based on this premise.

However, the majority of stakeholders, including schools, therapists and parents, raised a wide range of objections to the proposals. Stakeholders acknowledged the strengths and achievements of the Joint Service, but expressed concern about the proposed loss of specialist provision.

In consequence, the Council decided not to proceed with the proposals. The council acknowledged the views of stakeholders and agreed that:

- The future spectrum of provision should include some form of specialist provision for children with severe specific language impairments;
- The Council should evaluate the whole range of support for speech language and communication needs, including the mainstream service, in order to consider the specialist resource base and special school in context.
- There should be wider informal engagement with stakeholders, in order to decide on alternative options for moving forward.

2. The speech and language reference group

The group was established to provide a forum for stakeholders, including parents, teaching staff, governors and voluntary sector, to comment and contribute to the evaluation of current services for pupils with speech language and communication needs (SLCN). *(See Appendix 1, Terms of Reference).*

3. Methodology

The group met four times during the autumn and spring terms to receive and discuss presentations from each stakeholder setting out their role in the graduated response *(see Appendix 2, Cardiff graduated response to SLCN).*

The group met twice in the summer term to consider strengths, weaknesses, priorities for improvement, and recommendations for the Council.

In order to understand and evaluate the range of services and provisions supporting speech and language needs in Cardiff, the group invited and discussed presentations from:

- CVUHB Children's Speech and Language Therapy Service
- Cardiff Council specialist teacher team
- The Cardiff Joint Speech and Language Service (i.e. the above services in collaboration)
- Meadowbank Special School
- Allensbank SRB
- The roll out of WellComm to nursery settings

- Mainstream primary schools (example- Moorland)
- Mainstream secondary schools (example- Fitzalan)

Some information about speech and language support in other local authorities was considered by the group (see Appendix 3, *Survey of SLCN support in Welsh LAs*) and two members of the group visited an SRB in a neighbouring authority which has been identified as sector-leading (See Appendix 4, *ESTYN best practice example*).

A 2016 survey of mainstream parents was considered (see Appendix 5, *Mainstream parent survey, 2016*) and a former pupil and current governor of Meadowbank shared a view of his experiences at the school (see Appendix 6, *Letter from former pupil of Meadowbank School*).

The meetings were held at different schools so that the group had the opportunity to look around Meadowbank School, Allensbank SRB and Moorland Primary School, to see the teaching learning environments and observe children in class.

In July 2017, the Welsh Government published a report 'Study to map the current educational provision of speech and language and communication support in Wales', which provides a useful broader context for the work in Cardiff (see Appendix 7, *Study to map SLCN support in Wales*). The report found that Welsh local authorities are working in similar ways, based on a graduated response to needs at different levels. The report highlights a number of priorities for further improvement that echo some of the findings of the reference group, including: better support and information for parents; the need for consistency and sufficient capacity to deliver the model of graduated support; improving support in specialist settings such as PRUs; better support for pupils' transitions from primary to secondary.

The reference group agreed that the report offers some useful points in relation to the wider map of SLCN support, but does not provide any guidance or evidence in relation to specialist provision for SLI.

4. Overview- the graduated response to speech language and communication needs

In order to understand and evaluate the range of services and provisions supporting speech and language needs in Cardiff, the group invited and discussed presentations from a range of stakeholders.

This section comprises a summary from each stakeholder, briefly describing their service, school or activity, and an indication of the strengths and challenges they have identified for their service school or activity.

5.1 CVUHB Children's Speech and Language Therapy Service

About the speech and language therapy (SLT) service

The Children's SLT Service delivers assessment, diagnosis and intervention to children aged 0 – 18 years who experience significant difficulties with:

- Eating and drinking
- Language development
- Social Communication
- Fluency
- Voice

These difficulties may be specific or may be associated with a wide range of developmental disorders and medical conditions.

The service is delivered across Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan to children in a wide range of settings including:

- Community Clinics and Children's Centres
- Special Schools
- Mainstream schools and nurseries
- Outpatients, and on the wards, at the Children's Hospital for Wales (CHfW)

Some specialist services, particularly in the CHfW are specifically commissioned for children from across Wales.

The service has around 2,500 children on the total caseload at any one time.

The mainstream school service is a relatively recent development. Therapists work closely with specialist teachers in the SLCD team (i.e. the specialist teacher service) to deliver a joint service to children with SLCD in their local mainstream school. There is a single referral pathway and agreed roles and responsibilities. The therapists role is:

- Assessment
- Diagnosis
- Development and monitoring of treatment programmes which are delivered in school by a therapist, by school staff or by a member of the SLCD team
- Delivery of specific treatments when appropriate
- Review of progress
- Discharge when treatment is complete

Strengths of the SLT service

Mainstream school service:

- Agreed roles and responsibilities for therapists and specialist teachers – this underpins joint working and enables us to work efficiently. The mainstream therapy service could not operate without this.
- Joint referral process – ensures that most appropriate input is offered. Essential for efficient running of mainstream service
- Rolling programme of training offered to staff in mainstream schools - investment by LA in a therapy post specifically assigned to training, makes this possible.
- The training and resources provided for mainstream schools makes it possible for therapists to safely delegate therapy programmes to school staff. The mainstream service could not operate without this.

- The SLCD mainstream service is able to meet the needs of pupils in the medium of English or Welsh
- Pupils benefit from the language and social models of their peers.
- Our joint service, with therapist and specialist teachers working together on a shared caseload, is highly regarded by Speech and Language Therapy services across Wales and beyond – we are sector leaders.
- Feedback from service users (schools and families) has been overwhelmingly positive

Therapy service delivered in Meadowbank and Allensbank:

- *Clear roles and responsibilities between therapists and specialist teaching staff. Again, this is key to providing an effective service.*
- *Expertise in differentiating the curriculum to take account of children's speech and language needs.*
- *Staff skilled in delivering specific interventions.*
- *At the SRB, pupils have the chance to experience gradual transition and integration to mainstream, and benefit from the language and social models of their mainstream peers*
- *School staff deliver interventions consistently*
- *Support and training is provided for parents*

Challenges facing the SLT service

- Financial constraints – CVUHB is under close scrutiny by WG. Tier 1 targets include significant reduction in financial deficit by end of March 2018, whilst also meeting waiting time target.
- Therapy staffing levels are adequate when all staff are in post. However we struggle when there are staffing gaps during maternity leave and long term sickness and when recruiting to vacant posts.

5.2 The Speech, Language and Communication Difficulties (SLCD) Team

About the SLCD Team

The Speech, Language and Communication Difficulties (SLCD) Team is made up of Specialist Teachers, a Speech and Language Therapist and Specialist Teaching Assistants. The team are qualified and experienced in the field of speech language and communication needs.

The SLCD Team supports pupils at School Action + as well as pupils with Statements of Special Educational needs as outlined in the provision.

The SLCD Team:

- works in partnership with the NHS Speech and Language Therapy Service to provide the Joint Mainstream Service;

- supports schools in identifying pupils with speech, language and communication difficulties using Language Links and Speech Links. These screening tools are used in 100% of Foundation Phase settings. KS2 Language and Speech Links is being rolled out across all schools, with a view to achieving 100% coverage by 2019
- works with Cardiff schools to support and develop the skills of pupils who have speech, language and communication difficulties, through training and advice, guidance on how to support the development of communication skills in all pupils, and by working directly with some pupils where appropriate;
- works alongside school staff in the implementation of individual intervention programmes;
- offers support to implement small group interventions e.g. Talkabout, Talking Partners and Language Link;
- provides tailored training and support to teaching assistants funded through mainstream statements.

Strengths of the SLCD Team

- Collaborative working with NHS Speech and Language Therapists as part of the Joint Mainstream Service.
- The provision of individual programmes to pupils who require support to develop their speech and language.
- The provision of training, support and capacity building to schools to support them with their graduated response and early intervention.
- Joint working with other specialist teams where a pupil's needs are more complex and requires a broad approach, i.e. autism support, literacy and numeracy, sensory impairments, early years and disability.
- A wide range of expertise among the Team members.

Challenges facing the SLCD Team

- The capacity of the team is fixed, however referrals are increasing.
- Changes to staff - a number of new members have joined the team whilst others have moved on or reduced their working hours.

5.3 The Joint Speech and Language Support Service

About the Joint Speech and Language Support Service

The specialist teaching and therapy teams described above are separately commissioned by Cardiff Council and CVUHB, but the two services work collaboratively as a Joint Service for Speech and Language Support, delivering both universal and targeted support.

This successful partnership has its roots in the Speech and Language Pilots, which were funded by the Welsh Government from 2005-2008 (*see Appendix 7, slides 21-22*). CVUHB and Cardiff Council joined the Pilot in 2006, developing a shared vision for a joint service. The services continued to work towards this goal, strategically and operationally, after the Pilots ended.

The Joint Service continues to develop, is highly regarded by Speech and Language Therapy Services across Wales and beyond, and was shortlisted for an NHS Wales Award for Innovative Practice in 2009.

The key features of the Joint Service are:

- A shared 'graduated response', co-constructed by therapists and specialist teachers (*see Appendix 2*)
- A jointly delivered, comprehensive training programme to build capacity in Cardiff schools
- Screening for speech and language in Reception year (established in 100% schools), in Year 3 (59% schools) and year 7 (56% schools)
- A single speech and language referral point for all children and young people of school age. Previously there were separate referral processes for therapy and for specialist teaching, which could result in contradictory advice and duplication of effort. The single referral point has reduced the administrative burden for both services, and enabled a more efficient and targeted deployment of therapy resources.
- A shared caseload and agreed menu of interventions, with clearly identified roles for therapists, specialist teachers and teaching assistants

Strengths of the Joint Service

- At least one *ELKLAN trained teacher and one ELKLAN trained LSA in every primary school.
- Current goal to achieve the same training milestone in secondary schools by 2020(x% achieved)
- Speech and Language Links established in 100% primary schools, resulting in universal screening for speech and language needs in Reception year.
- Current goal to achieve universal screening in year 3 by 2019 (x% achieved)
- Screening provides schools with a profile of speech and language needs for the whole cohort, identifying needs at a class, group and individual level;
- Speech and Language Links programmes provide practical class-based strategies for improving speech and language skills at class, group and individual level.
- In 2015-16, end of year rescreening showed an overall improvement of Compared to initial screening.
- Quality of therapy referrals has improved due to screening and training
- The single referral point has reduced the administrative burden for both services, and enabled a more efficient and targeted deployment of resources

In 2015-16, CVUHB took the decision to roll out a school-based therapy service. Initial therapy assessments are still undertaken in clinic, but ongoing therapy is delivered in the child's school. This development

- Has been well-received by both schools and parents
- Ensures closer communication between school and therapists

- Reduces the amount of school hours missed to attend therapy
- Results in fewer children being discharged for non-attendance at clinic
- Is more convenient for many parents

The Therapy Service has emphasised that the ability to provide a school-based service is dependent on continued collaboration with the specialist teacher service.

**ELKLAN: a recognised provider of accredited speech and language courses for teachers, teaching assistants and parents.*

Challenges facing the Joint Service

- Collaboration has been achieved through strategic and operational joint working over the several years, but there is no formal agreement or memorandum of understanding between Cardiff Council and CVUHB. Although the processes and shared practice are well embedded, and are not reliant solely on individual managers or practitioners for their maintenance, the collaboration could be vulnerable in the event of a significant restructure/ organisational change within either the Council or CVUHB.
- The SLCD Team is now part of a traded service offering support to schools through an SLA. A small number of schools have taken the decision to 'opt out' and make their own specialist teaching arrangements. This could put the Joint Service at risk, with particular implications for the single referral route, school-based therapy service, universal screening and capacity building in schools.
- Collaborative support for speech and language needs in specialist settings for behaviour emotional and social needs, and complex learning disabilities is less developed than in mainstream.
- An effective collaborative approach between therapists and teaching staff operates in Meadowbank and Allensbank, but the schools have not been involved in the development of the Joint Service, or had the opportunity to share their expertise with the other special schools and SRBs.
- The Joint Service arrangements cover children and young people aged 4-16, but does not cover children aged 3-4. To ensure effective early identification, it would be beneficial to consider extending the arrangements to this age group.

5.4 Meadowbank Special School (See also Appendix 5: Letter from a former pupil of Meadowbank School)

About the School

Children are referred to Meadowbank School because they have a primary additional learning need of profound/severe speech and language and communication difficulties. The school caters for children whose non-verbal skills and achievements are generally better developed than skills and achievements that rely on good verbal skills. This means that the children catered for may have primary difficulties and experience problems in the following areas:

- Discriminating speech sounds
- Producing speech sounds
- Understanding or expressing meanings of words
- Understanding or producing grammatical sentences
- Understanding or using language for social communication
- Acquiring reading and writing skills and understanding written language

Teachers, teaching assistants and speech and language therapists work collaboratively to support the children in developing and using strategies that facilitates them in accessing a differentiated curriculum.

Strengths of the School

- Small classes where children's emotional wellbeing, self-confidence and self-esteem are considered to be central to their development. This philosophy is an integral part of the whole school ethos.
- Small classes enable staff to meet the individual needs of all children.
- Highly specialised teaching staff that are experienced in educating children with the most profound/severe speech, language and communication difficulties.
- Additional support from experienced teaching assistants who are specialists in working with pupils with speech and language difficulties.
- Speech & language therapists who are assigned to each class and work with individual children, groups and at a whole class level according to the needs of the children.
- Combined teaching and speech & language therapy in class.
- Specific individually tailored education and language targets that are written jointly by teachers, speech & language therapists and teaching assistants and delivered through the whole school curriculum.
- Carefully planned and structured learning opportunities that enable children to transfer new skills (speech sounds and their use of language) into the classroom, the whole school, at home and in the wider community. Children, therefore, have the maximum opportunities to generalise their newly learnt skills.
- A range of specialist strategies, signed speech systems, programmes, resources and teaching materials that are embedded throughout the curriculum to support teaching and learning.
- A unique and differentiated curriculum that focuses on meeting the needs of children with profound/severe speech and language difficulties.
- Daily assessment of children's progress to ensure that children's learning is relevant and current to their needs and is moving at the pace of the individual learner.

- Multidisciplinary collaboration with a range of professionals to ensure a holistic approach to meeting children’s needs.
- Individually tailored integration and transition programmes into mainstream primary and high schools and other specialist provisions. Children are supported with a high level of support by staff from Meadowbank. Children’s progress is carefully monitored and the programmes are adapted to meet their needs.
- An Early Year’s Outreach Service that provides support for identified children and up-skills staff in mainstream nursery settings.
- Collaborative working between staff in the Early Year’s Outreach Team, speech and language therapists and other professionals.

Challenges Facing the School

- Lack of/limited referrals to the school over the past few years.
- Uncertainty over the future of the school due to the consultation that was carried out by the Local Authority and the subsequent review of speech and language provision in Cardiff and the impact that this has had on pupil and staff wellbeing.
- Experienced staff leaving the school due to this uncertainty.
- Reduction in the school’s annual budget due to the falling role and the impact that this has on replacing experienced staff.
- Lack of a Deputy Head/SLMT due to the size of the school/reduced budget.
- Small number of pupils at the school and the impact that this has on class dynamics.
- The lack of awareness amongst staff in many mainstream schools that there is a special school for children with severe/profound speech and language difficulties.
- Parents are not given the opportunity to make informed decisions on their child’s placement regarding the full range of specialist provision for children with speech and language difficulties.
- The role of the early year’s outreach service and how this dovetails into statutory assessments and referrals to the school.
- The lack of a revolving door/assessment model of provision such as the Day Class that was highlighted as ‘excellent practise’ by Estyn.
- Developing greater links with the Local Authority’s central team for children with speech and language difficulties in order to utilise the experience of staff at Meadowbank in supporting children in mainstream schools and up-skilling mainstream practitioners.

5.5 Allensbank Primary School Specialist Resource Base (SRB)

About the SRB

The purpose of the SRB is:

- To provide a flexible resource base which is responsive to the individual and group needs of pupils with severe speech language and communication needs who have been placed in the SRB.
- To provide an environment in which children with complex learning needs can make progress through a broad and balanced curriculum, including access to the National Curriculum.
- To provide age appropriate learning opportunities to develop a range of language, literacy, numeracy and social skills.
- To provide a safe and empathetic environment for children with complex learning needs.
- To establish and maintain strong links with a mainstream peer group, in order to provide opportunities for pupils in specialist provision to:
 - Practise and further develop social and communication skills;
 - Develop the skills required for effective learning and teaching to occur in a larger group context.
- To work in partnership with parents and other professionals.

Strengths of the SRB

- SRB children are taught by experienced staff who provide access to Specialist programmes and strategies.
- Staff work closely with the Speech Therapist who is based within the school for 1 day a week.
- As a mainstream setting, Allensbank is able to offer excellent levels of integration for pupils placed within the SRB. Pupils participate fully within the general life of the school but also integrate for lessons such as literacy, maths, science or P.E. according to their individual needs.
- Transition back into a pupil's mainstream setting is always a focus and pupils are supported (where appropriate) to maintain friendship groups within their local catchment school in order to support transition into High School.

Challenges facing the SRB

- The SRB currently has only one class for Key Stage 2 pupils. There are also falling numbers in terms of pupils being admitted to the SRB.
- Pupils often present with other needs beyond that of Speech and Language. Meeting the needs of pupils within the base can therefore be challenging.

5.6 WellComm in nursery settings

About WellComm

The WellComm Screening Toolkit provides early years settings with a comprehensive screening tool for both receptive and expressive language development.

WellComm is already established in Flying Start settings, ensuring continuity and consistency across early years settings.

WellComm:

- assists practitioners in the identification of language delay and impairment
- provides evidence to inform referrals where appropriate (i.e to Speech and Language therapy or other health services)
- provides strategies for practitioners and parents to address a child's needs in a fun and engaging way
- supports identified needs by setting specific, measurable targets
- increases the chances that mild to moderate language delays may be resolved without the need for a SALT referral
- includes parents in the assessment and intervention process

Cardiff Early Years Inclusion Team committed to delivering a WellComm pilot package for Nurseries in Cardiff. From September 2016 to July 2017 we have:

- Delivered training on screening and delivering intervention using the WellComm Toolkit to 43 nurseries
- Trained 86 members of staff

1,830 children were screened in 2016-17

65% were identified as green - age appropriate (0-6 month delay)

21% were identified as amber – delayed (a 12-18 month delay)

14% were red – significantly delayed (a 24-42 month delay)

A significant number of the red and amber children were learners of English as an Additional Language (EAL).

All children who were identified as red and amber received intervention activities from the suggested WellComm activities.

47 referrals were made to the Joint Speech and Language Service.

53 referrals were made to special school outreach services or to specialist teacher services

Strengths of the approach

- Training evaluations have been positive from 100% of settings
- The WellComm toolkit and training has allowed Early Years practitioners to identify children on entry to nursery with delays in receptive and expressive language skills.
- It has provided nurseries with the information to make an ongoing referral to Health services and Educational outreach services for further support.

Challenges

- The initial pilot has seen a 'surge' in therapy referrals, which has posed a challenge for the speech and language therapy service
- Further work is need in partnership with the therapy service and SLCD Team , to establish thresholds for referrals, ensure the tool is part of the graduated response and practice is embedded in the Joint Speech and Language Service
- Training for ALNCo's will be offered, providing an overview of using WellComm data when children transfer to school

5.7 How mainstream primary schools support SLCN (example- Moorland)

Purpose of the approach

To provide a broad and balanced education within an inclusive learning environment.

To ensure that every child is able to access appropriate support for their speech and language needs in order for them to be able to make good progress in all aspects of their learning and development.

Strengths of the approach

- Speech and language therapists working closely with pupils, their parents and staff within the school environment. (Far fewer missed appointments).
- Regular advice and support from the specialist teacher team.
- The range of training now available to mainstream teachers and support staff.
- Wellcomm screening for every nursery pupil ensures that speech and language difficulties are identified early and appropriate support programmes put in place.
- Language Link screening for every pupil in reception and intensive group intervention for pupils with discernible delays in speech and language development. The opportunity to re-screen through the use of Infant and Junior Language Link also ensures that progress is monitored and sustained.
- The presence of positive speech and language role models throughout the learning environment. (other pupils)

Challenges

- Ensuring that staff have the knowledge, skills and capacity to meet the needs of children with severely delayed or impaired speech and language within a busy mainstream environment.
- The broad range of complex additional learning needs with which staff need to be familiar and the challenges of making appropriate provision for all of these.
- Parental reluctance to remove children from the familiarity and friendships of their local school, even when there are compelling educational grounds to do so.
- Inconsistencies in practice between different mainstream settings.
- Staff retention once they become highly trained and skilled.

5.8 Support for speech language and communication needs in specialist settings for learning disabilities, behaviour emotional and social needs, autism and hearing impairments

Brief overview of speech and language support

NB The reference group has not looked at this issue in detail. This brief overview is provided by the Senior Achievement Leader Inclusion, and has been checked with the Children's Speech and Language Therapy Manager for accuracy.

Complex Learning Needs: Ty Gwyn, Woodlands, Riverbank, SRBs at Whitchurch High, Bryn Hafod, Llanishen Fach, Llanedeyrn and Marlborough Primary Schools.

Therapists working with these schools provide a service in line with the same graduated response that applies for pupils in mainstream and the specific language settings at Meadowbank and Riverbank.

Of xx pupils in these settings in 2016-17, xx pupils were identified on PLASC as having speech language and communication as a primary need. Many pupils would also have SLCN as a secondary need.

The majority of these pupils are at stages 1, 2 or 3 of the graduated response and are not currently in receipt of direct therapy input as their speech and language skills are consistent with their ability and cognitive functioning. However, they continue to require support to develop their speech language and communication skills as part of the specialist curriculum in the SRBs and special schools.

Children with SLCN in association with severe learning disabilities benefit from:

- Consistent use of an appropriate signing system such as Makaton
- Consistent use of visual strategies to support learning and communication
- A specialist curriculum, differentiated to individual learning needs and focussed on the development of speech language and communication skills
- Therapy support in line with the graduated response
- Consistent delivery of therapy programmes by specialist teaching staff in the settings

Behaviour emotional and social needs: The Court, Greenhill, Bryn y Deryn, SRBs and wellbeing classes at Fairwater, Glan yr Afon, Springwood, Pen y Groes

Many children who present with behavioural emotional and social needs, are known to have underlying or associated SLCN. It is also well established that a high proportion of adults in the criminal justice system, or known to mental health services, have difficulties with speech language and communication that have often been missed in childhood.

In Cardiff, it is believed that universal screening in Reception has helped to reduce the risk that SLCN will be overlooked, or that SLCN may be mistaken for BESN. However, the Council is aware of this risk and has taken various steps to ensure this is considered at every stage, including:

- Referrals for behaviour support are checked to ensure SLCN have been considered
- Specialist teachers in the behaviour support team have been trained to 'screen' for SLCN and work closely with the SLCD Team

Children with SLCN in association with BESN benefit from:

- A specialist curriculum, differentiated to individual learning needs and focussed on the development of speech language and communication
- A focus on the development of social communication skills
- Therapy support in line with the graduated response
- Consistent delivery of therapy programmes by specialist teaching staff in the settings

Autism spectrum conditions: Ty Gwyn, The Hollies, Marion Centre, SRBs at Cantonian, Llanishen and Cathays High Schools, and at Springwood and Pentreban Primary Schools

Therapists specialising in ASC work closely with specialist teaching staff to provide support and advice on a consultative basis at all ASC settings. As with the Joint Service for Speech and Language, professionals follow a co-constructed graduated response.

As social communication is a significant area of need for all ASC pupils, direct individual therapy is rarely considered to be appropriate or beneficial: support for social skills development is best embedded in the curriculum and specific coaching is most effective when delivered in groups.

Hearing impairments: SRBs at Llanishen High and Coed Glas Primary

Therapists specialising in hearing impairments work closely with specialist teaching staff at the SRBs, to provide support according to the graduated response. This includes direct therapy, provision of therapy programmes and consultative advice and support.

Strengths of current approaches

- Collaborative working is strong in ASC and HI settings. Therapists and the majority of teaching staff have higher qualifications in their specialist field, and support for SLCN is embedded in the specialist curriculum of these settings
- Practice in many settings for complex learning settings is effective
- Support for SLCN in some BESN settings is developing, and most schools recognise the importance of this aspect of their work

Challenges

- More needs to be done to ensure all special school and SRB staff in settings for complex learning needs and for BESN have access to training in SLCN, and that support for speech language and communication is embedded in the curriculum
- Makaton should be used consistently in settings for children for moderate or severe learning disabilities (i.e. the SRBs for complex learning at Bryn Hafod, Marlborough, Llanishen Fach, Llanedeyrn, Whitchurch High, and at Riverbank and Woodlands). Capacity to deliver this is currently inconsistent.
- Therapists and teaching staff operate the same graduated response as the Joint Service in mainstreams schools, but the specialist settings were not directly involved in the co-construction of this approach. As a result, staff may not have a sense of 'ownership' and there continues to be some tension regarding the roles and responsibilities of education and health staff.
- Some parents assume that access to therapy will be an automatic benefit for every child in a special school, and can feel let down when they realise this is not the case. Therapists

provide support on the basis of assessed need, regardless of whether a child attends a special school, an SRB or mainstream.

5. The graduated response in Cardiff- strengths

The group reflected on what had been learned about the range of support and services to support speech language and communication and identified the following strengths:

General points

- Collaboration between health, LA and schools
- Agreed roles and responsibilities for therapists and specialist teachers – this underpins joint working and enables us to work efficiently. The mainstream therapy service could not operate without this.
- Range of provision providing access to a range of services to meet the range of need and range of ages
- Expertise of a range of professionals- therapists, specialist teachers, special school staff
- Working with parents

Mainstream schools

- Joint referral process – ensures that most appropriate input is offered. Essential for efficient running of mainstream service
- School-based therapy service
- Awareness of mainstream schools of speech language and communication needs
- Ability of mainstream schools to identify speech and language needs through screening- WellComm, Language Links
- Universal screening in Reception year
- Early identification leads to pupils receiving support at an earlier stage
- Rolling programme of training offered to staff in mainstream schools - investment by LA in SLT makes this possible.
- The training and resources provided for mainstream schools makes it possible for SLTs to safely delegate SLT programmes to school staff. The mainstream service could not operate without this.
- The SLCD mainstream service is able to meet the needs of pupils in the medium of English or Welsh
- An increasing number of mainstream schools providing effective support
- Pupils benefit from the language and social models of their peers.
- The joint service is highly regarded by SaL Therapy services across Wales and beyond – Cardiff is regarded as sector leading.
- Feedback from service users (schools and families) to therapy service has been overwhelmingly positive.

Meadowbank and Allensbank SRB

- Special school and SRB providing high quality and intensive support for the most complex children; opportunity to integrate a holistic specialist curriculum

- Clear roles and responsibilities between therapists and Specialist Teachers. This is key to providing an effective service
- At the SRB, pupils have the chance to experience gradual transition and integration to mainstream, starting with brief, incidental experiences
- Expertise in differentiating the curriculum to take account of children's speech and language needs.
- Staff skilled in delivering specific interventions
- School staff deliver interventions consistently
- Support and training is provided for parents

6. Challenges and concerns

The group identified the following concerns and challenges facing schools and services in Cardiff:

Early intervention in mainstream pre-school settings:

- SLT service for children below reception age is mostly clinic based
- SLTs liaise with specialist teacher services eg ECLIPS but we don't have a joint service.
- Referral process via PARM does not support early intervention
- SLT have not been engaged sufficiently in the WellComm project – huge impact on referrals to SLT last financial year. No joint planning has taken place about how to manage children identified as needing intervention.
- Nursery staff have not had the comprehensive training which mainstream school staff have had. Referrals are often inappropriate and staff are not confident about making referrals themselves – they tend to ask family to get the GP or HV to refer.
- There is not enough provision for children who need intensive input in the pre- reception years
- The transition from Early Years teams to SLCD team not yet joined up enough

Mainstream school service:

- Therapy staffing levels adequate when all staff in post but gaps in staffing during SLT staff vacancies, maternity leave and sick leave are challenging
- A small number of pupils need more support than this service can provide. They need a small class environment where the curriculum is differentiated and delivered to take account of pupils with SLCD. They may also require signing, symbols or access to other AAC (Alternative and Augmentative Communication)
- Consistency of support in mainstream- i.e. ensuring all schools achieve same standard of best practice, focussing on wellbeing, as well as learning
- Recognition that speech and language skills underpin formal literacy skills
- More joining up between specialist teacher team, special school and SRB on delivering training and support
- Time and funding to support professional development

Referral processes

- Faster response when children in mainstream are not making progress
- Information for parents to better inform decision on placement
- Raising awareness of benefits of specialist provision in all ethnicities

Speech and language specialist interventions in generic SRBs and special schools:

- Children placed in generic SRBs, Riverbank and Woodlands often have SLCD as part of their profile but staff in these provisions have not yet had the same level of training as staff in mainstream schools.
- Interventions not implemented consistently in all classes
- Signing, symbols and other AAC not implemented consistently across classes and provisions

Meadowbank and Allensbank

- There are no specialist SLCD provisions in the medium of Welsh
- Therapy staffing levels adequate when all staff in post but gaps in staffing during SLT staff vacancies, maternity leave and sick leave are challenging
- There are no opportunities for incidental, day to day integration with mainstream peers at Meadowbank (e.g. in assembly, at play and lunch times, or in individual lessons as appropriate) – this can increase anxiety levels of parents at transition
- A small number of pupils need to use signing as a long term communication aid need - they need a sign system which is commonly used in other settings (e.g. Makaton or Signed English)
- SRB pupil outcomes impact on whole school data, resulting in an inaccurate picture of whole school performance

7. Recommendations

The group recommend that the Council should:

Partnership between Cardiff Council and CVUHB

- a) Consider setting up a ‘memorandum of understanding’ between the CVUHB and Cardiff Council, to formalise the collaborative arrangements that underpin the Joint Service for Speech and Language Support.
- b) Where schools ‘opt out’ of the specialist teaching SLA, ensure robust approaches for monitoring school compliance with the graduated response, to ensure school practice remains consistent and equitable, and the benefits of the Joint Service continue.
- c) Work with the Speech and Language Therapy Service to further develop the Joint Speech and Language Service for children in early years settings, building on the current work in relation to WellComm.

Parents

- d) Improve the quality and availability of information for parents, and raise awareness of support and provision at all stages, including the availability of specialist provision.

Mainstream support

- e) Continue work to establish and maintain universal screening (Speech and Language Links) in Foundation Phase, KS2 and KS3, and to establish speech and language trained staff in every primary and secondary school.

- f) Explore opportunities for special school teachers to work with mainstream schools, providing intensive daily support to groups of children, and modelling interventions to mainstream staff. This approach could be piloted in a transition cluster where speech and language needs are particularly high.
- g) Establish better links between Meadowbank, Allensbank and the SLCD Teacher Team, enabling SRB and special school teachers to contribute to training and support in mainstream schools and other specialist settings.
- h) Ensure that ALN funding is indexed to need, to ensure schools with highest levels of ALN receive proportionately higher funding.
- i) Improve support for transitions: from nursery to primary; from primary to secondary; from mainstream to a specialist setting; specialist settings to mainstream.

Specialist SLCN provision

- j) Consider options for revising admission criteria for specialist provision. For example, consider whether there is a case for extending Meadowbank criteria to open some classes for pupils with other areas of need, as well as continuing to offer classes for pupils with specific language impairments.
- k) Consider options for offering specialist speech and language provision on a time limited 'revolving door' basis, to provide early intensive intervention without the need for a statement.
- l) Consider making provision for 'assessment places' at Meadowbank and/ or Allensbank SRB.
- m) Reintroduce the speech and language provision panel to ensure all professionals are involved in placement decisions, and in advising parents on placement.

Speech and language support in other specialist settings

- n) Improve speech and language support for children with SLCD as part of a complex profile of needs, especially those in specialist settings for behavioural emotional and social needs and complex learning disabilities.
- o) Consider potential for drawing on the skills and experience of specialist staff at Allensbank and Meadowbank to improve speech and language support in other specialist settings.