

Better Communication Research Programme

Newsletter 2 2011:

Tracking the Impact of Language and Communication Needs

www.warwick.ac.uk/go/bettercommunication

If you are receiving this newsletter then you are involved in the part of the Better Communication Research Programme that is tracking the impact of language and communication needs in schools. We are very excited to be sharing our news with you in our second newsletter!

Thank you to all participating pupils, families and schools!

What we are trying to find out

This project will help us to understand about teaching and learning for children and adolescents with a range of language and communication needs. The aim of our study is to look at the needs of pupils who have language difficulties or autism spectrum disorders while they are at school.

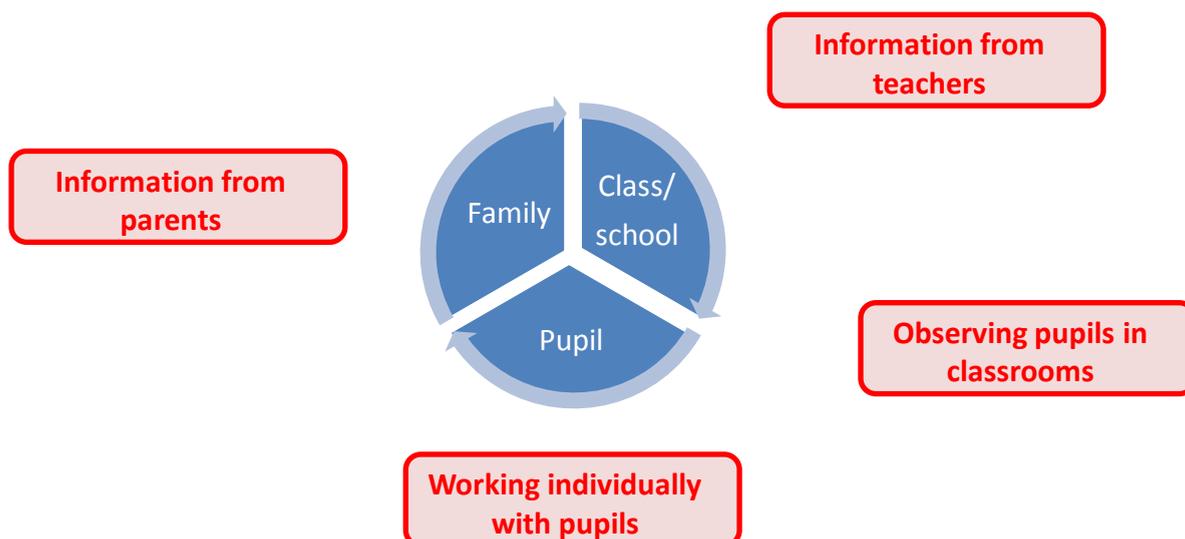
How children will benefit

By finding out more about children's speech, language and communication needs, we hope that we will be able to suggest effective ways of better meeting their needs.

Who we are working with

We are working with approximately 170 families and over 85 schools in five Local Authorities in and around London: Barnet, Harrow, Hertfordshire, Hounslow and Lambeth.

What we have been doing this year (year 2 of the project)



This year we have been working individually with pupils, doing classroom observations and asking parents and teachers to complete questionnaires. We are very excited to share some of our initial findings with you below.

Working with pupils



The individual assessments that we have been doing with pupils have provided us with interesting information about performance in a range of areas including language, literacy and socio-emotional development. Here are some of our initial findings:

Language and literacy

- As expected, pupils with identified language difficulties found tasks tapping language and communication challenging. Many pupils with autism spectrum disorders also found language and communication activities difficult.
- Literacy difficulties could be observed in both groups but were more common in pupils with language difficulties than those with autism spectrum disorders.
- However, for a number of children literacy was an area of relative strength.
- Additionally, pupils with autism showed more varied language and literacy skills than those with language difficulties.

Socio-emotional well-being

- We also asked the children and adolescents to complete a self-report questionnaire and to tell us their views about different aspects of their well-being, including their physical health, friendships, free time, school and learning.
- Our initial findings were mostly positive and pupils with language difficulties and autism did not seem to differ from pupils without special educational needs in terms of their well-being.
- However, some pupils expressed concerns about bullying in school.

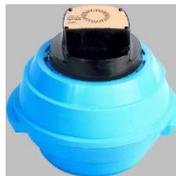
Other activities with pupils...



Learning new words



We are teaching pupils new words for things that an alien might use. Some of these objects are shown above and below. This aspect of the project will help us to understand whether the children and adolescents involved in the study have difficulty acquiring new vocabulary.



Memory

7,9,1...
2,5,4,8...

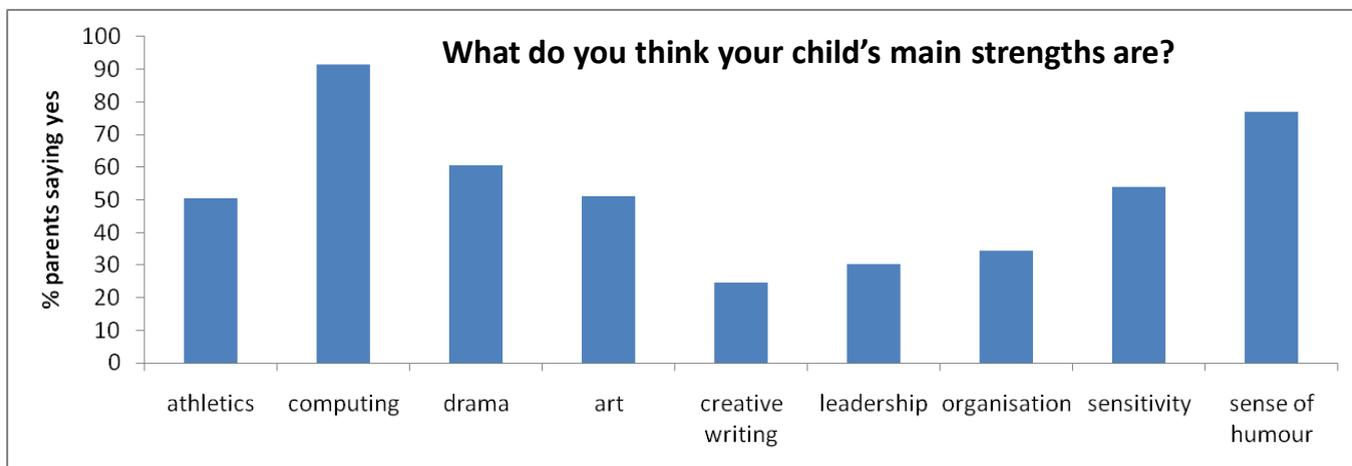
We are seeing how well the pupils can remember strings of numbers. This helps us to understand whether some pupils have language difficulties because they find remembering information difficult.

Observing pupils in classrooms

- As researchers we often work with pupils independently. However, it is important that we also get a sense of how children respond to teachers' instruction and how they behave when they are with their peers and other people in the classroom.
- Additionally, there is limited information available on how pupils with speech, language and communication needs are supported and whether the curriculum is differentiated for them.
- During the second year of our study we had the opportunity to observe all the pupils that are participating in our study for thirty minutes during literacy or English lessons.
- The classroom observations gave us a novel insight into the way pupils were supported during literacy and the way they responded to the lessons.

Information from parents

- Our colleague Lindy Peacey conducted telephone interviews with the parents of pupils who are participating in our research study.
- Parents provided very interesting insights into their children's strengths and needs.
- Additionally, they expressed their views on a range of issues including their children's academic progress and their satisfaction with the support they were receiving from school.
- Parents identified a range of strengths in their children. The most frequently reported strengths were computer knowledge and use and sense of humour - see graph below.



- When they were asked about their children's academic progress in school over the last year, most parents reported that progress was good or quite good.
- However, some of the parents expressed less positive views and seemed to be concerned about their children's educational progress.
- Some parents also indicated that they would like to play a larger role in making decisions about the support that their children receive in school.

Information from teachers

- We asked teachers to tell us about the support pupils have been receiving in the classroom and the strategies that are being used to facilitate their learning.
- The majority of pupils are supported by teaching assistants or learning support assistants in the classroom or in small groups or individually outside of the classroom.
- A few pupils also have additional support from teachers and the school SENCO..



- The curriculum is being differentiated for most of the children and teachers identified the use of a wide range of strategies, such as simplifying tasks and using different reminders.
- Of the 13 strategies identified, the most commonly employed are the use of extended examples and limiting the number of concepts presented at any one time.
- Use of technology (such as a computer or tape recorder) and special programmes were the least reported strategies.

What we will be doing in year 3 of the project

- Reflect on the information that we have collected the last two years.
- Further individual work with the children to investigate their progress on language, literacy and other aspects of their educational and socio-emotional development.
- Ask teachers and school staff to complete questionnaires so that we continue to get a relatively holistic picture about the support that the pupils are receiving through the different stages of education.

The wider impact of our research

- Our research is funded by the Department for Education and the results will be used by the government to guide provision for children with language and communication needs.
- We will continue to raise awareness of language and communication needs by presenting our research to policy makers and a range of professionals who work with pupils including teachers, educational psychologists and speech and language therapists.
- Our steering group includes educational psychologists, paediatricians, representatives from voluntary organisations and researchers and regular meetings with this group informs our research.
- We are presenting our findings at national and international conferences, this will allow us to describe our findings to practitioners and the wider academic community.

The team



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Our website

Keep an eye on our website as we'll be updating it with news regularly:

www.warwick.ac.uk/go/bettercommunication

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