

## A whole school approach to supporting children's language

Jean O'Neil, Headteacher has been convinced, for many years, of the importance of children's speech and language. Key drivers for developing a focus on children's language at *St Peter's C of E* primary school were:

- A 2006 Ofsted report highlighting the exceptionally low levels of oral language on entry
- High percentage of children with EAL
- Language difficulties impacted on standards, difficult to make up for the initial deficit

Originally involved in the Heywood language project, staff in the school understand the importance and the need to support children's language. The Assessment for Learning initiative, nurture groups, whole school targets with a language link all aimed to support children's language – as well as prioritising the appointment of a teaching assistant with special responsibility for speech and language.

In 2009, Ofsted highlighted the ongoing issue of poor models of English and this provided the impetus for becoming involved with I CAN. Two key programmes were introduced in the foundation years. The school also employed their own part time speech and language therapist, introduced Talking Tables and revised their oracy assessments. They were keen to extend their involvement with I CAN.

I CAN *Early Talk*  
accreditation

CLLD Project

I CAN *Primary Talk*  
Linked to performance management  
targets

### Impact:

Staff awareness, confidence and knowledge is hugely improved in the Foundation Stage via I CAN *Early Talk*. Further down the school, *Primary Talk* produces outstanding teaching across both key stages.

To find out how *Primary Talk* could work in your school,  
contact I CAN today 0207 843 2515 or email [primarytalk@ican.org.uk](mailto:primarytalk@ican.org.uk)  
Visit [www.ican.org.uk/primarytalk](http://www.ican.org.uk/primarytalk)



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## **Primary Talk case study: Ditcheat Primary School**

Ditcheat Primary School were looking for a way to raise the profile of speech, language and communication in their school, in a way that benefitted all pupils. With the full support of the Headteacher, the governors, all the staff and parents during 2008/9 they participated in the pilot of the *Primary Talk* programme.

All staff received *Primary Talk* training and support on how to implement what they had learned. The school's *Primary Talk* coordinator made sure that staff reflected on their learning and shared their practice with each other, ensuring that speech, language and communication were embedded throughout the school day. Ditcheat Primary school was successful in achieving accreditation at supportive level.

The impact on the whole school became very evident to see, and three years on it still is.



- Pupils are more confident in their learning and their communication skills.
- The pupils are happy to talk at school, and equally happy to ask questions if they don't understand.
- There is a culture of talking in the school that means no classroom is silent.
- Posters showing approaches and strategies are pinned up around school
- Primary Talk* has helped teachers and staff to be reflective in their practice and they understand the importance of speech, language and communication for learning. They remind each other about how their style of communication
- Primary Talk* training has also helped teaching staff to become more skilled and confident at identifying pupils with speech, language and communication needs and they now realise how common these difficulties are.

Through *Primary Talk* and accreditation, Ditcheat Primary achieved “...more than they could have hoped”. The embedding of communication supportive practice in the school means that the benefits continue to be seen by all staff and pupils 3 years on.

***“There is a culture of talking in the school that means no classroom is silent.”***



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## Sheffield evaluation of *Primary Talk*

A team from Sheffield University carried out an independent evaluation of Primary Talk. They found that Primary Talk had a significant impact on the school environment.

**I CAN's *Primary Talk* has a significant impact on classroom practice and helps to improve school environments for all children, including those with SLCN.**

Compared to other schools, the research team found that in ***Primary Talk*** schools:

- Staff used significantly more strategies to support children's communication
- There was a highly significant change in the amount that lesson planning differentiated for children's speech, language and communication needs
- Communication skills were more frequently taught
- Staff grew noticeably in their confidence to monitor speech, language and communication

Headteachers and staff found *Primary Talk* a valuable tool with which to engage staff in the speaking and listening curriculum and provide a communication supportive environment to meet the needs of all children.

School coordinators strongly agreed that *Primary Talk* was worth the considerable effort involved in implementing it in their schools. They felt the strength of the programme to be in raising the profile of speech, language and communication in school, and its impact on classroom practice.

*"Adapting the classroom is what staff have taken on board more easily and enthusiastically. There is lots more visual information around school that has clearly been thought about, rather than lots of words everywhere. They've really taken that on board."*

***Primary Talk* co-ordinator**





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## Further evidence on the impact of *Primary Talk*

In a follow up survey of a pilot school, staff reported a positive impact on pupils' communication skills, on their engagement in learning and their behaviour.

### **Learning:**

More children are now understanding what the teacher is saying, due to slower speech, clarification of language used and signing. This in turn allows children to access the curriculum with success.

The children are progressing better, especially in the foundation stage where they have gained more points on the early year's foundation stage profile.

### **Behaviour:**

This has improved as they are less frustrated and more involved, they understand more. Less challenging behaviour, children know what they are doing and understand how others behave and why.

### **Communication:**

The children's communication is much better, interactions, conversational skills, confidence and thinking skills have greatly improved.



*Last November I carried out lesson observations – nearly all lessons were outstanding in terms of questioning, dialogue and deep learning. What was clear was the link between dialogue, questioning and the opportunities for extended talk – all key elements of Primary Talk. They allow children the space to think, and for adults to listen to children.*

Headteacher, Rochdale



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