

Talk Boost is 'Pure Dead Brilliant!'



Talk Boost is a targeted intervention for children with delayed language. It was recently used in North Ayrshire, Scotland to help develop children's speech, language and communication skills.

Claire Morrison and Eileen Halbert, Speech and Language Therapists at NHS Ayrshire and Arran/ Professional Learning Academy, North Ayrshire have written about their experience with it.

In 2017, Talk Boost was formally 'launched' in North Ayrshire, Scotland as part of the Scottish Attainment Challenge. Even though Talk Boost is much more wide spread in England, we were very excited to see the impact of the programme in Scottish education settings.

We started small, with a pilot study in a small village school trialling Talk Boost KS1, with approximately 90 pupils in an area of high social deprivation. Three groups of P1-4 children (Reception-Year 3) were identified and made huge progress over the ten-week programme. This progress was recognised by class teachers and the senior management team who were delighted at the gains made by the children and this was also observed in their written literacy work. Due to the success of the pilot and 'word of mouth' amongst Head Teachers, Talk Boost KS1 quickly 'snow balled' in North Ayrshire, with numerous schools signing up for the formal launch session in August 2017. Since then we have trained 30 schools in Talk Boost KS1, 15 schools in Talk Boost KS2 and 4 Early Years settings in Early Talk Boost and this number continues to grow every year (the initial schools involved were located in the highest areas of social deprivation but now Talk Boost is offered to all schools in North Ayrshire).

From August 2017 – June 2019, we actively supported the schools through weekly coaching and mentoring sessions whilst they delivered their group sessions. This support involved joint planning of sessions with the 'Group Leaders' (typically Classroom Assistants); delivering a group session if required for staff to observe, occasional 'team teaching' and discussion of weekly whole class lessons.

One of the most crucial aspects of North Ayrshire's Talk Boost success was the regular assistance we provided when schools were carrying out the pre-intervention Trackers to select appropriate pupils, which greatly increased the confidence of staff and Group Leaders in identifying children with SLCNs.

Feedback from staff has been fantastic, with all schools acknowledging the improvement in vocabulary, attention & listening, expressive language and general confidence. Improvements also transferred to the children's literacy skills, in particular story writing. Due to the wide spread success of the programme, several schools have now built Talk Boost into their yearly planning and the initiative is now integral to the school curriculum, with specific children identified each term to target pupils with language delay.



Feedback from Teachers on Talk Boost

"Talk Boost has been really beneficial and effective for both pupils and teachers. It has also linked in nicely with the work on Reading Comprehension Strategies. Keep up the amazing work!" (P1/2 teacher)

"F has improved in confidence and is keen to participate in group and class discussions. His oral input to writing lessons has really improved and he is working on trying to transfer this into his written work more independently" (P2 teacher)

"I have seen a huge improvement in K's confidence and Literacy skills across the board" (P3 teacher)

"Child K's story structure has significantly improved and it's now transferring into her writing" (P3/4 teacher)



There has been significant collaboration between P1-3 teachers observed through sharing of Talk Boost lesson resources and joint planning sessions, to ensure that listening and talking are key elements to the school day which are highly valued. Too often, listening and talking are taken for granted and not enough time is spent on fostering these crucial skills, whereas Talk Boost KS1-trained schools value this and therefore treat it as a high priority which is built into the school day. Class teachers have found the whole class lesson resources so accessible and impactful that they now utilise them as part of their daily teaching routine.



Feedback from Pupils on Talk Boost

“It’s helped me with vocabulary and making my sentences longer” (P3)

“I talk more to the teacher and people in my class. I was shy before but not now” (P3)

“Telling stories – it has helped me think more and get more ideas. Vocabulary – better at describing” (P3)

“Talk Boost has shown me how to use Who, Where, When, What and Feelings when writing a story” (P3)

This visible success has resulted in senior education managers commenting on the high quality interaction on display and increased staff and pupil confidence when visiting schools, clearly illustrating the importance of speech, language and communication skills.

One year on from the initial training, we wanted to check the sustainability of Talk Boost KS1 so we revisited two schools to re-track some of the children involved. This showed that the progress they had made during Talk Boost had been maintained, and in some cases improved further.

Our colleagues in South and East Ayrshire saw the impact of Talk Boost KS1 in North Ayrshire and due to this were keen for the intervention to be rolled out to schools in these authorities and were trained in 2018, therefore illustrating the ‘domino effect’ of Talk Boost success Ayrshire-wide.

Due to the demand for Talk Boost training in our authority, our role is now more on a ‘consultative’ basis instead of weekly visits, whereby we offer drop-in sessions for schools to source support when required. This has meant schools have become more independent in running their own programmes and has subsequently developed a school support network where they can contact each other for Talk Boost advice and discussion as appropriate e.g. Group Leaders visiting each other’s sessions.

“As children return to school after Covid-19, Talk Boost KS1 will continue to have a key role in closing the vocabulary gap and raising attainment. It has been shown to have a proven success rate in North Ayrshire, therefore we will be encouraging schools to continue with Talk Boost KS1 to foster the key listening and talking skills which are so crucial for life success.”

Due to current restrictions, we are planning to utilise technology to deliver Talk Boost training sessions virtually and have already been contacted by a few schools for advice on how to restart their Talk Boost KS1 journey in this new academic year.

Our authority now actively embraces Talk Boost KS1 as a key initiative in closing the poverty-related attainment gap and it is a highly valued resource in developing children’s speech, language and communication skills in North Ayrshire.

As we say in Scotland, we think Talk Boost is ‘pure dead brilliant!’.



Do you want find out more about how Talk Boost can help in your setting or local authority?

You can reach I CAN by calling **020 7843 2515** or e-mailing **info@ican.org.uk**

