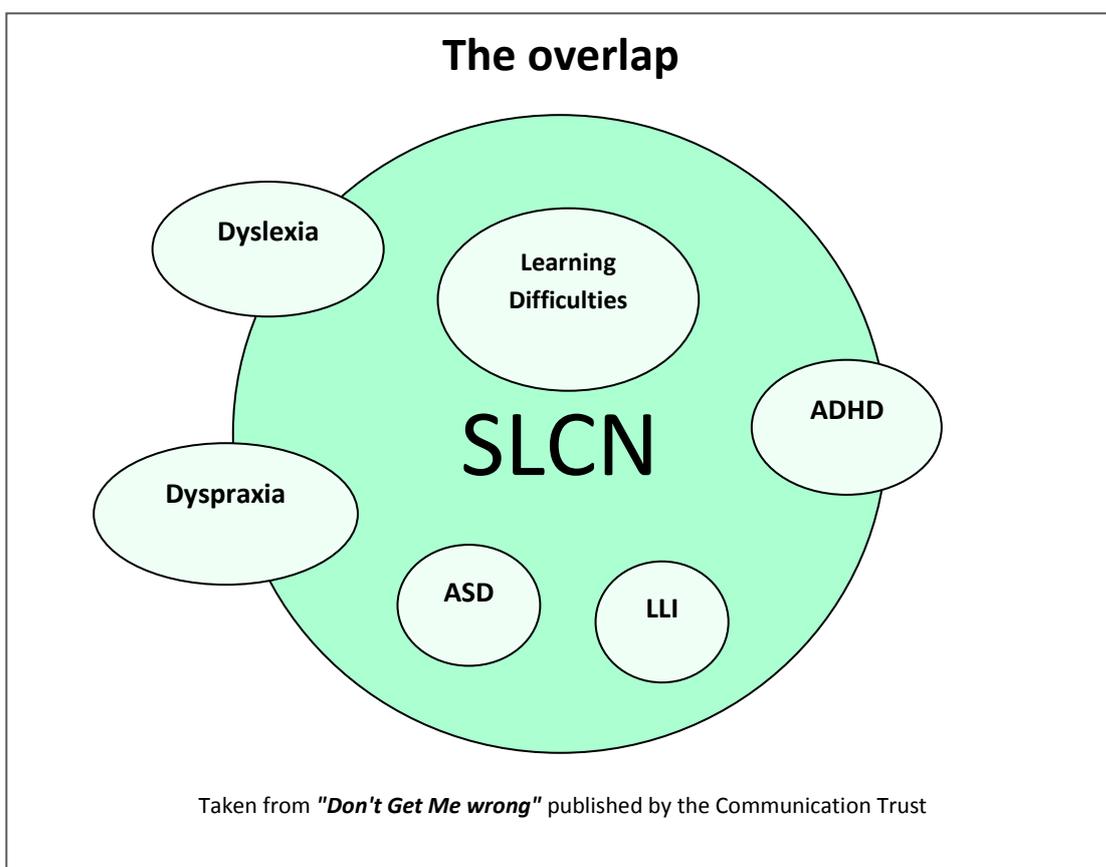# A Guide to Identification of SLCN

Identification of SLCN can be problematic for many reasons: children may have other difficulties as well as SLCN, they may have a wide and complex range of needs and there can be co-occurrence with other labels and diagnoses as seen in the diagram below:

The overlap

Dyslexia

Learning Difficulties

SLCN

ADHD

Dyspraxia

ASD

LLI

Taken from ***"Don't Get Me wrong"*** published by the Communication Trust

SLCN is often considered to be a 'hidden disability'. Some aspects of SLCN are more visible than others, particularly those associated with speech and sound. Others are less so, for example, the child who is experiencing difficulty in understanding or using language may appear to be inattentive, passive or even rude. There are children who become very skilled at hiding their difficulties e.g. by watching other people so they know what to do or by pretending they know when they don't. SLCN may be missed altogether or masked by these other characteristics.

Taken from **"Don't get me wrong"** published by the Communication Trust

Many children with SLCN go through life without their needs being identified (e.g. 65% of young offenders, for example, were found to have SLCN but in only 5% of cases had these been previously identified - Bryan et al 2007).

ALWAYS look 'beyond the behaviour' and consider SLCN if there are concerns about any aspect of the child's development and behaviour

EARLY IDENTIFICATION

The importance of early identification of SLCN cannot be over-emphasised. It is essential that needs are identified as quickly as possible so that early action can be taken to meet those needs. There is a 'window of opportunity': if a child's speech, language and communication skills are similar to those of their typically-developing peers by the age of about five-and-a-half, their life-long prospects are considerably better. (The Inclusion Development Programme: Early Years Foundation Stage: Speech, Language and Communication Needs)

When?

For some children, identification will have been initiated and SLCN recognised when the child is very young. For other children, the difficulties may emerge later, as the child starts nursery or school. Sometimes SLCN

are not apparent until the child is older, perhaps as the school curriculum becomes more challenging or the child is showing increasing signs of frustration resulting in difficulties that affect behaviour. SLCN may also be a result of an acquired brain injury or trauma in the child's life.

Who?

The process of identification may be initiated by a variety of people depending on the child's age and the circumstances involved, including:

- Parents
- Health visitors
- GPs
- Community paediatricians
- Pre-school staff
- School staff
- Specialist teachers
- Educational psychologists

It is important that everyone involved works closely together to ensure a consistent approach for the child and family.

How?

Accurately identifying SLCN requires careful observation of the child in a variety of contexts, knowledge of the environment and a range of tools to provide a complete picture of the child's strengths, difficulties and needs. The most reliable assessments will take into account the child's views, parents' knowledge of the child and observations from all professionals who are involved with the child.

Assessment should be regarded as a continuous process over time, not as a single event. The aim of assessment is to gather evidence to inform and enable appropriate and timely support and provision for the child.

For useful guidance and further information refer to:
Talking Point www.talkingpoint.org.uk - information for health visitors, GPs, parents etc.

There are a number of tools within the Worcestershire SLCN Pathway to help with the process of identification and assessment over time. These include:

- Initial concerns and early warning signs: Checklist of indicators

- Background information needed

- Child's voice

- Parent discussion

- Observation tools

- Developmental norms

- Identifying the nature of the SLCN

Initial concerns and Early Warning signs

I am concerned about a child's speech, language and/or communication development. What can I do?

Is the environment "communication-friendly"? *(see Universal section of the website)*

What "Early Warning signs" are there? *(download 9.4/9.5)*

Have you discussed your concerns with the SENCo (or equivalent member of staff?)

What are the child's views? *(download the template from the Identification of SLCN page)*

What "Background information" is already available? *(see below)*

Consult with parents – see "Parent discussion" *(download the template from the Identification of SLCN page)*

Refer to developmental norms *(download from the Identification of SLCN page)* to check if the child is achieving age-appropriate developmental milestones in relation to their speech, language and communication skills.

Carry out a focused observation of the child. What are the child's language and communication skills like in different contexts? See Observation tools *(download 9.6/9.7/9.8)* and Profiling Tool *(download 9.9)*

SLCNPathway

Checklists

There are 2 checklists (one for pre-school children download 9.4) and the other for school-age children (download 9.5) to highlight children who are of concern and to begin to build up a picture of the child's SLCN. Health visitors, GPs and Community Paediatricians may also find it useful to refer to the Guidelines for Referral to Speech and Language Therapy which can be found on the service's website.

Case Studies:

For examples and descriptions of children at different ages and with different types of SLCN, refer to the case studies in the SLCN Inclusion Development Programme (Module 3 "The Appearance of SLCN") as well as Section 2 of *"Don't get me Wrong"* *published* by the Communication Trust
www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk

Gathering background information

✓ Check what information is already available (e.g. observations, assessment information, etc). For example, Health Visitors may have gathered information about the child's SLCN through their Ages and Stages assessment, a tool which is used to establish the developmental levels of young children.

✓ Enquire about the child's hearing and request test if necessary.

✓ Check if there any physical factors that might be affecting development (e.g. vision, cleft palate, motor difficulties).

✓ Are there any additional languages other than English spoken in the home?

✓ Have any outside agencies been involved?

- In some cases, professionals from outside agencies such as Health, Education, Social Services, etc. may have already been involved with the child.

Things to consider: SLCN may have a root cause in another area of difficulty such as Dyslexia, Autism Spectrum Disorders, Dyspraxia, so the following questions should also be considered:

What else could be causing these difficulties?

Is it SLCN because of other possible contributory factors such as health, environmental factors, emotional state, memory, a learning difficulty or physical disability, hearing/visual loss, emotional/social/ behavioural issues, etc?

Is it a PRIMARY SLCN or is it part of the overall profile?

Who do I need to consult with?

Additional evidence and data

There are a number of tools available to support the identification and assessment process and settings and schools may already be aware of or using a variety of these to gather evidence and identify needs:

- The <u>Health Visitor 2 ½ Year Check</u> became statutory (nationally) in April 2010. This is used universally by Health Visitors and can assist in the early identification of SLCN. *Ages and Stages* is used in Worcestershire and is carried out at 2½ years. To accompany this and to support the decision to refer a child to Speech and Language Therapy, Health Visitors are trained specifically in identifying SLCN and have access to *Guidance for referral to Speech and Language Therapy Service.*

- <u>Language Link</u> – www.speechlink.info is a universal screening and early identification tool to identify children with receptive language difficulties. Results show which children should be referred to the Speech and Language Therapy Service and which children would benefit from school-based language intervention. A large number of primary/first schools across Worcestershire are using Language Link.

- <u>Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP)</u> - The primary purpose of the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile is to provide Year 1 teachers and parents with reliable and accurate information about each child's level of development as they reach the end of the EYFS. This will enable the teacher to plan an effective, responsive and appropriate curriculum that will meet all children's needs, to support their continued achievement more fully. During the Reception class, each child's development is recorded against the 13 assessment scales of the EYFSP which are based on the early learning goals and divided between the six areas of learning and development. Judgements against these scales should be made from observation of consistent and independent behaviour, predominantly from children's self-initiated activities.

- National Curriculum/P levels/EYFSP

- Assessing Pupils' Progress (APP) in Speaking and Listening

- Assessment for Learning

- Standardised assessments

- Outcomes from reviews (e.g. CAF, SEN Code of Practice)

- Pupil Tracking systems

- Provision Maps (whole school, group, individual)

- Evaluation of targeted interventions

Child's Voice

Children should be actively involved and their views sought as part of their assessment and review and to inform the planning of their provision. Depending upon the developmental level of the child and their individual needs, settings and schools can choose from a range of tools to seek children's views (see Whole Setting/School Approach). However, it is important to consider the developmental level of the child, the form of communication the child typically uses and ensure that the child's answers are facilitated in the medium in which they usually communicate.

The 'Child's voice' form (downloadable from the Identification of SLCN page) is intended for use when it is suspected that a school-aged child has SLCN which may require further support. This form may also be used as part of the process of information gathering and assessment. The information can then be used to monitor children's views over time and the progress they feel they are making.

Parent discussion

Parents play a critical role in their children's education and it is essential that their views are considered. They are in a unique position to be able to provide key information about the child's strengths and needs to support the identification process. The 'Parent discussion' form (downloadable from the Identification of SLCN page) can be used when staff suspect a child has SLCN and as part of the process of information gathering and assessment over time. This will give parents the opportunity to contribute their knowledge and understanding of their child's needs. This information could then be passed on to external agencies should they become involved.

Observation

Observation of the child in a variety of settings can provide a wealth of information about a child's speech, language and communication skills in context and is an essential part of the process of assessment and identification of need.

> See '*Language for Learning in the Primary/Secondary School'* for suggestions about how to carry out observations and record the information gathered.

Developmental Norms

> *Is the child developing at the same rate as his or her peers?*

In order to identify whether a child has any problems with their speech, language and communication we need a really good understanding of "typical" development.

The *Speech, Language and Communication Development chart* (downloadable from the Identification of SLCN page) can be used either for reference to remind us of "typical" development, or as an assessment tool. Using the *Speech, Language and Communication Development chart,* it is possible to make a judgement as to whether a child is developing as expected in this area or seems delayed.

- Judgements of a child's stage of development are made through a process of ongoing observational assessment.

- Through observation we can record what children do and say in a range of contexts; information from families about what the children do and say at home should be included (particularly if English is their second language).

- The assessment is a "best fit" match to a stage band. This involves considering what is known about the child, and matching it to the development described.

- Each strand of communication is described separately (i.e. understanding, expressive language, speech) and it is possible that some children may only have a delay in one area, and others have difficulties in several strands.

- In considering whether a child is delayed it is necessary to consider the child's actual age in months in relation to the overlapping age bands.

- If a child is within 2 months of the end of the age band and development is not yet within the band or is judged to be "emerging" then a judgement of " delay" would be appropriate

- The developmental chart can be used to record progress over a period of time.

- If a child has a considerable delay at the outset, or fails to make progress then onward referral to the speech and language therapist should be considered.

Identifying the nature of the child's SLCN

The following checklists can be used to gather further information about the child and help identify the specific area of SLCN in which the difficulties lie.

- Early Years (download 9.6)

- Primary (download 9.7)

- Secondary (download 9.8)

Observe the child in a range of settings and identify the nature of the difficulties. The Profiling Tool Sheet (download 9.9) can be used to record examples of the child's speech, language and communication skills under the following headings:

- Speech

- Expressive language (speaking)

- Receptive language (understanding)

- Social/functional use of language

Other useful checklists include: The AFASIC checklists (LDA) for 4-5 years and 6-10 years as well as for secondary (AFASIC, 2009) and the "indicators list for identifying communication difficulties" in Appendix 1 of the Communication Trust's www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk "Don't Get me Wrong" publication.