

## **Talking about Bradford...**

### **Bradford's context**

Bradford is celebrated as an extremely diverse city; culturally, socially and economically. Schools range from the inner city to the suburban and semi-rural. There are 140 different mother-tongue languages spoken by children in primary schools in the Bradford district with 43 per cent of pupils (23,000 of 54,146) speaking English as a second language. A commissioned report by Better Communication CIC (June 2013) estimated that 47% or 3699 pupils enter Reception classes in Bradford district schools each year with impoverished language skills. Two dedicated groups of professionals are working together to develop schools' understanding of the importance of language for learning and social development.

### **Language for Learning Steering Group**

The Language for Learning [LfL] Steering Group are a small group of headteachers, deputy heads, council officers and independent consultants who believe that talk and language are at the core of all learning. We meet on a regular basis to share information, to plan events and training and to develop materials for schools and parents which promote the importance of language acquisition and talk for learning. Some of our work is supported by Council funding and some is self-funded through one-off training events, but we do not have a regular budget and all of us have 'day-jobs'!

### **Bradford's SEN Services [Cognition and Learning Service]**

Bradford has a team of specialist teachers who provide a service of assessment, training, support and advice for every mainstream primary and secondary school in the city of Bradford.

As our Service's assessments increasingly identify language as an area of need and as a potential barrier to progress and achievement, we developed a service delivery plan to address the needs of children and young people with SLCN.

### **A taster of LfL work....**

#### **The 'Talking Children' Campaign**

Last year we published materials aimed at parents to promote key messages about the need to talk with their children at home. Every child in the district received a 'Talking Children' leaflet in the form of a fun comic-strip. The comic provided Ten Top Talk Tips through the storyline and suggested topics to talk about. 'Talking Children' bus banners coincided with the release of the comic and a local media event also helped to raise public awareness. Children from schools across the District completed pages in a 'Talking Children Charter' – a talking book presented to the Deputy Lord Mayor, telling the Council why talk was important to their learning. Each school received a 'Talking Children' banner for their school gates to encourage parents to talk with their children through a weekly Talk Topic such as 'If you had superhero powers what would they be?' Next academic year we intend to produce Issue 2 of the 'Talking Children' comic; offer more guidance on how to use the materials and provide more Talk Topics for the school banners. A number of schools have used the resources to great effect but we aim to increase the amount of schools that do so and to continue to raise awareness with parents.

## **Developing strong knowledge and skills...**

Each year we run a Language for Learning Conference, which not only celebrates good practice in Bradford but also brings national expertise and current research to the District. This year's conference theme was 'Talk in the new National Curriculum' and included key notes from Pie Corbett and Wendy Lee, who focused on the need for high quality talk in our classrooms. A range of excellent workshops on talk in all areas of the curriculum was also provided. Children from two local schools shared their high level debating skills with us as they discussed an audience selected issue – 'Should a footballer be paid as much as a doctor?', whilst children at lunchtime engaged teachers in conversation about how they had improved their levels of vocabulary in their school.

Some of the regular training opportunities we provide or promote include:

- Early Years' Language Development training [Bradford Council Early Years' Advisory Service and Children's Centres ' Training Consortium]
- ELKLAN and Communication Friendly Schools' Accreditation training [Bradford Council SEN Services]
- Talk for Learning [based on Robin Alexander's dialogic talk principles]
- Talk for Writing [Pie Corbett]
- Talk for Reading
- Talking Maths and Talking Partners [Education Works]
- It's only words: teaching vocabulary [Jane Dallas and Carol Satterthwaite]

We run termly Language for Learning Managers' training and network sessions, which provide key updates and 'taster' sessions for the training offered or signposted by the group. Last year we also organised a Teach-Meet session focusing on the use of IT to develop talk skills.

## **The Talking School / Setting Campaign**

Last year we sent a simple Talking School / Setting Route Map to all schools and settings in Bradford, providing some basic signposts of what a Talking School looks and sounds like and how to access training. This year we will be continuing to build a network of schools and practitioners who believe that good progress is much harder to achieve without placing language and talk at the heart of learning and the curriculum.

## **Bradford District's Debating Society**

This coming year LfL will launch a new and exciting venture – a district-wide Debating Society and Competition. Based on innovative work in three Primary schools in the city, this year sees 45 more schools taking part. Schools are divided into local triads, whose children from Y5 and 6 meet termly to debate a given topic. Two teams prepare a 'for' and 'against' argument before the session and then debate the issue, with the third school judging their performances based on agreed criteria. The winning team takes home the trophy and engraves it with their name, until the next term... At the end of the year we will hold a Debating Society All Schools' Competition with adults and children as judges!

## **Bradford Council Cognition and Learning Team: Elklan Communication Friendly School Accreditation**

All specialist teachers in the Council's SEN Services, Cognition and Learning Team, are trained as Elklan tutors or co-tutors. Our successful bid to deliver Elklan Communication Friendly Schools Accreditation, gained funding from CIC and The Communication Trust. In September 2012, the accreditation programme

was offered to an initial cohort of 10 primary schools, 2 of whom have a Designated Special Provision for SLCN and 1 for Autism. The response from schools far exceeded the places available and we decided to act on the enthusiasm of schools and run the accreditation with a further 8 schools in January 2013.

The Communication Friendly Schools (CFS) accreditation is now an established part of our local offer to schools and is well respected and valued by them. We are currently working with a further 10 schools and have another 10 committed and ready to go from September 2014. School evidence shows that the impact on learning and teaching has been entirely positive. Visual supports, vocabulary development, effective questioning and strategies to support independence and communication are embedded in these schools, seen in each classroom and used by all, including non-teaching staff. Pupils are using strategies such as Mind Maps, Task Plans and visual supports independently across the curriculum and there is genuine enthusiasm from them regarding learning new words, talking about text and writing.

### **Speech and Language Forums**

We developed Speech and Language Forums (SALF) to share the knowledge and expertise in the CF Schools and to sustain this very positive impact on learning and achievement. Forums are currently held each term in 4 schools across the city, based around 6 key themes: Speech Sounds, Vocabulary, Comprehension, Visual Supports, Social Communication and Attention, Listening and Independent Learning. The presentations, resources and information at the Forums are about what schools do that works well, every day, in every classroom. The Forums have been well attended and received. In the long term we aim to increase the number of CF Schools and Forums across the city so Education, Health and Social Care professionals can access them as centres of good practice and information for children and young people with SLCN.

### **Let's Talk**

We believe that working with families is vital for sustaining and maintaining the high profile of the CFS status and that the schools themselves are best placed to build supportive relationships with families. To this end we have recently trained staff in CFS schools in the Elklan Let's Talk parents' programme.

The impact of all of this work has undoubtedly raised the profile of SLCN across the city. Staff in the CF Schools feel more confident in identifying and teaching children with SLCN and do so with enthusiasm. There is a real 'buzz' at the Forums as colleagues share ideas, learn from each other and make those connections between language development and learning and wellbeing. Referrals to our team are increasingly more specific and make reference to language needs rather than just poor academic progress as was previously the case. It is our ambition that each primary school in the city achieves the accreditation!

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