

## Advice about Children with Speech Sound Difficulties for Primary School Teachers

Some children have difficulty with developing and using speech sounds. This can make their speech unclear to others. Not all speech sound difficulties are the same however. Some children's speech can just be immature whilst others have more severe and persisting difficulties. Likewise, not all children cope with such difficulties in the same way. Some will manage well, showing resilience, but others, and particularly those with more severe and persisting difficulties, may need more support, since areas such as self-esteem, making friendships and literacy development can be affected. Your speech and language therapist (SALT) will be able to give you more information about individual children's speech difficulties.

### Speech Difficulties and Literacy Development

Depending on the nature and degree of the speech sound difficulties, children may need extra support in the following areas in order to help them to develop their literacy:

- Listening and attention. Children might need to work on these skills before they can improve their speech or progress successfully with their literacy.
- Learning to hear differences between sounds (e.g. between [t] and [k]). The sounds may sound the same to the child and make matching sounds to letters challenging (phoneme/grapheme correspondence).
- Learning to break words up into their component sounds and to blend these sounds together to read whole words. The child may have difficulty with 'holding' sounds and words in memory.
- Spelling
- Children with phonological difficulties will need extra support to access the year 1 phonics check because they have not mastered the phonological skills required for speech development and these are the same as required for learning literacy
- Building self-esteem for some children whose awareness of their own speech difficulty may impact on their willingness to participate in speech and literacy based activities.

## Other ways to help

### General ideas:

- Spend more time on the first phases of learning, for example on the 1st phase of 'Letters and Sounds', developing, for example, sustained attention, listening in the environment and general phonological awareness. Children with speech sound errors have underlying difficulties with all speech processing skills and so will need a lot of extra support and practice with phonological awareness skills, including:
  - ⇒ Sound discrimination
  - ⇒ Recognition of rhyme
  - ⇒ Production of rhyme
  - ⇒ Splitting words into syllables
  - ⇒ Syllable blending
  - ⇒ Onset and rime (e.g. h-at)
  - ⇒ Splitting words into sounds and blending sounds to make words (excluding consonant blends, for example 'st').
- Give clear 'models' of target words so children have a chance to hear how these words should sound.
- Repeat back to the child any word they are having difficulty saying. Do not make the child repeat it unless a SALT has advised this.
- Children with speech difficulties may need more time than others to respond within activities and to complete tasks.
- Check that it is developmentally appropriate for the child to be using a particular sound in their literacy. (Ask the SALT to give you more information about individual children's difficulties).
- Use the sound not the letter name, and say the sound on its own, not over emphasising it which can often add a vowel sound to it. E.g. [t] not /tu/.
- Check letter/sound knowledge by asking the child to point to letters you say (if they cannot say the sounds).

## Year 1 Phonics check– possible issues and ways to help

Taken from Communicating Phonics– Communication Trust

([www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk](http://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk))

Further Information can be found at Meeting Individual Needs. Speech Language and Communication Needs. A Good Practice Guide (Leicester City Council document)

The child may be easily distracted and may have difficulty perceiving speech sounds. → [Use a quiet distraction free environment.](#)

It can be hard to know if the child's errors are due to not knowing the phoneme associated with the grapheme or being unable to say the sound) → [Seek information from a SALT to understand the specific difficulties a child has. It might be necessary to use alternative strategies to check phoneme-grapheme correspondence, for example:](#)

- [Identifying single graphemes by signing or gesture \(for example, Jolly Phonics action, Cued Articulation sign\).](#)
- [Compiling a list of simple words that are within the child's sound system to use as a screen.](#)

Children with phonological difficulties may need more time to process and produce their responses → [There should be no time constraint when completing the check.](#)

Children are likely to have difficulty with non-words → [They will need extra tuition in this area.](#)

Some children with speech difficulties have additional comprehension difficulties → [Check they have understood. Use short sentences, using words the child is familiar with. If needed, accompany with familiar signs/symbols.](#)