

A Brilliant Universal Provision Model for Speech, Language & Communication in Primary School

Children learn language through hearing high-quality language **every day**. Universal provision begins with adults being consistent.

If children cannot understand language through listening alone, we must give them another way in.

What This Looks Like Across a School

A visitor to your school would notice:

- Calm, uncluttered spaces
- Adults speaking clearly and intentionally
- Visual supports in daily use
- Children encouraged to explain, ask, and try
- Communication praised as a skill
- Adults modelling communication within the following five strands -

1. High-quality adult language, *language that is*

- ★ Short, not simplified
- ★ Repetitive, not boring
- ★ Calm, not rushed
- ★ Correct, not critical

2. Visual & multimodal teaching, *language is easier to understand when it is seen, heard, and experienced together. A language friendly school is a visual school where adults support spoken language with*

- ★ Visuals (pictures, symbols, photos, objects)
- ★ Gestures and actions
- ★ Consistent layouts and cues
- ★ Predictable routines shown visually

3. **Vocabulary-rich classrooms.** *Children cannot use words they have never heard, seen, or practiced.*

- ★ A vocabulary rich classroom makes unfamiliar words explicit, visible, repeated and playful
- ★ Vocabulary is not left to chance, it is deliberately taught and revisited often
- ★ Children are encouraged to hear, say, see and use words
- ★ Vocabulary grows through intentional teaching and repeated use, not exposure alone

4. **Explicit teaching of communication skills.** *Communication skills must be taught, practiced, and revisited — not assumed.*

- ★ Adults teach communication deliberately, just like phonics or maths
- ★ This includes teaching how to listen, speak, take turns, ask for help, stay on topic, and talk about feelings.
- ★ Adults will name the skill, model it clearly, practice regularly, and give feedback using consistent language
- ★ Behaviour improves when communication improves

5. **A communication-friendly school culture.** *Communication is everyone's responsibility everywhere and every day. Staff value effort over perfection.*

- ★ The environment, routines and adult behaviour actively support understanding and expression
- ★ Children will be more able to communicate successfully when the school culture is calm, predictable, inclusive, and responsive
- ★ Staff make understanding easier which builds confident, independent communicators
- ★ When communication is supported everything else improves

High-Quality Adult Language

High quality adult language is intentional and supportive. This helps children to understand, process and use language themselves. By using high quality adult language we reduce linguistic load, we make meanings obvious, we model correct language without harsh corrections, and we use predictable wording that children understand and internalise.

This is especially effective for early language development, children with EAL or SEND, behaviour regulation and building independence

Use Short, Clear Instructions

What this means

Adults **say less**, not more. Instructions become

- Concrete
- Action-focused
- One idea at a time

Avoid: Long explanations packed with extra language

Aim for: Clear verbs + objects

Example - Instead of

“Can you all stop what you’re doing because we’re going to tidy up soon and then we’ll sit nicely on the carpet and listen to the story.”

Try

“Stop.”

“Tidy up.”

“Carpet.”

Or:

“Tidy up now.”

“Sit on the carpet.”

Chunking of Information

What this means - Breaking tasks into **small, manageable steps** and give them **one step at a time**.

Why it helps

- Reduces cognitive load
- Supports memory and processing
- Helps children succeed independently

Example Task: Getting ready to go outside

Chunked:

1. "Coat on."
2. (Pause)
3. "Zip up."
4. (Pause)
5. "Line up."

Not chunked:

"Put your coat on properly, zip it up, and stand quietly by the door."

Slowing the Pace of Speech

What this means – clear respectful modelling

Adult

- Speak **slightly slower**
- Pause between phrases
- Emphasize key words

Example - Instead of:

"Hangyourbagupandcometothecarpetquickly."

Say:

“Hang... your bag... up.”

(Pause)

“Come... to the carpet.”

This gives children time to:

- Process language
- Match words to actions
- Respond successfully

Modelling Language by Recasting

What this means - When a child speaks, the adult **repeats it back correctly**, adding or adjusting grammar **without saying “no” or correcting it directly**.

Why it works

- Protects confidence
- Models correct language naturally
- Encourages longer sentences over time

Example - Child says → Adult recasts

- **Child:** “Me want car.”
Adult: “You want the car.”
- **Child:** “Dog run fast.”
Adult: “Yes, the dog is running fast!”
- **Child:** “Him sad.”
Adult: “He is sad.”

The child hears the *correct form* in context.

Using Consistent Scripts

What this means

Adults use the **same short phrases repeatedly**, so children:

- Predict what will happen
- Learn routines through language
- Internalise self-talk strategies

A. “First → Then”

Used for:

- Transitions
- Motivation
- Reducing anxiety

Examples:

- “First tidy up, then outside.”
- “First maths, then snack.”
- “First shoes, then play.”

Over time, children begin to say this to **themselves**.

B. “Stop → Look → Listen”

Used for:

- Safety
- Attention
- Following instructions

Example:

“Stop.”

(Pause)

“Look.”

(Pause)

“Listen.”

This works especially well before:

- Crossing spaces
- Giving instructions
- Managing impulsive behaviour

C. “My Turn → Your Turn”

Used for:

- Turn-taking
- Social communication
- Shared play and learning

Examples:

- “My turn to roll the dice”
- “Your turn to roll the dice”

In talking activities:

- “My turn to talk.”
- “Your turn to talk.”

This builds:

- Conversation skills
- Self-control
- Understanding of fairness

Putting It All Together: A Full Example

Scenario: Tidying Up

High-quality adult language might look like this:

“Stop.”

(pause)

“First tidy.”

(pause)

“Then carpet.”

Child: “Me finished.”

Adult: “You are finished. Well done.”

Short. Chunked. Calm. Predictable. Modelled.

Visual and multimodal teaching

This approach will reduce language load, support comprehension before expression, increase independence, and will benefit all learners.

A visual, multimodal environment shows routines, not just explains them, makes expectations visible, allows children to understand before they speak and supports independence and confidence

Visual Timetables

What they are - A **visual timetable** shows the structure of the day using:

- Pictures or symbols
- Words + images
- Objects of reference (for very early learners)

Displayed at **child eye level** and referred to frequently.

Why they matter - Visual timetables:

- Reduce anxiety about “what’s next”

- Improve transitions
- Support time concepts
- Reduce repeated verbal questioning (“What are we doing now?”)

Example

Whole day timetable:

-  Arrival
-  Carpet time
-  Writing
-  Snack
-  Outside
-  Lunch

Adult language:

“Let’s check the timetable.”

“Now is snack. Next is outside.”

Adaptations:

- EYFS: photos of actual classroom areas
- KS1+: symbols with words
- SEN: remove completed items to show progress

Now – Next – Then Boards

What they are - A **short-term visual support** showing:

- **Now:** the current task
- **Next:** what comes immediately after
- **Then:** the motivating or preferred activity

Often used 1:1 or in small groups.

Why they matter - They:

- Support children who struggle with transitions
- Increase engagement and task completion
- Make expectations absolutely clear

Example

Behaviour support:

- Now: 🖋️ Writing
- Next: 🧹 Tidy
- Then: 🚲 Outside

Adult language:

“Now writing.”

“Next tidy.”

“Then bikes.”

Emotional regulation support;

- Now: 😌 Calm body
- Next: 🧘 Quiet corner
- Then: 🎨 Choose play

Picture-Supported Instructions

What this means - Adults **pair instructions with pictures or objects**, not just speech.

This is essential when:

- Teaching new routines
- Giving multi-step instructions
- Supporting processing difficulties

Example

Hand-washing routine (displayed near sink):

1. 💧 Turn tap on
2. 🧼 Soap
3. 🖐️ Rub hands
4. 💧 Rinse
5. 🧻 Dry

Adult language:

“First soap.”

“Then rub.”

Classroom routine (lined up by door):

- 🦻 Quiet
- 👁️ Looking
- 🖐️ Hands down

The adult points while speaking.

Keyword Boards

What they are - A small set of key words (with images) linked to:

- A topic
- A lesson
- A story
- A routine

Displayed **where learning happens**, not just on walls.

Why they matter - Keyword boards:

- Highlight important vocabulary
- Reduce reliance on long verbal explanations

- Support recall and sentence building
- Help children use subject-specific language

Example

Science topic: Plants Keyword board:

- 🌱 Seed
- 🌿 Stem
- 🍃 Leaf
- 💧 Water
- ☀️ Sun

Adult language:

“This is the *stem*.” (points)

“The *leaf* is green.”

Story time Keywords:

- 😊 Happy
- 😞 Sad
- 😡 Angry
- 😱 Scared

Children can:

- Point instead of speaking
- Copy words into sentences later

Gestures and Actions

What this means - Adults **use consistent gestures** to reinforce meaning:

- Pointing
- Actions

- Facial expression
- Body movement

Gestures are **intentional**, not random.

Why they matter - Gestures:

- Anchor meaning
- Support memory
- Help children link words to concepts
- Reduce processing load

Example

Concept teaching

- “Big” → arms wide
- “Tiny” → fingers close
- “Stop” → flat hand
- “Listen” → hand cupped to ear

Instructions

“Sit.” (hand moving down)

“Line up.” (sweeping arm)

Emotions

- Happy → smile
- Sad → drooped shoulders

Children often copy gestures before using words.

Explaining New Concepts Multimodally

Example: Teaching “Floating and Sinking”

Instead of **only talking**, adults:

- Show objects
- Demonstrate in water
- Use gesture (up/down)
- Display keywords (float / sink)

Adult language:

“This floats.” (hand up)

“This sinks.” (hand down)

Children:

- See
- Hear
- Experience

This makes abstract language concrete.

A visual, multimodal environment:

- Shows routines, not just explains them
- Makes expectations visible
- Allows children to understand before they speak
- Supports independence and confidence

Vocabulary-Rich Classrooms

Daily Vocabulary Teaching

What this means - Vocabulary is taught **every day**, in small doses, using:

- Pictures or objects
- Child-friendly definitions
- Spoken examples
- Opportunities to hear and use the word

Adults aim to teach **fewer words well**, rather than many words briefly.

Example: Daily Vocabulary Routine (5–10 minutes)

Word of the day: “Enormous”

1. Say it

“The word is *enormous*. Say *enormous*.”

2. Show it

- a. Picture of an elephant next to a mouse
- b. Gesture: arms stretched wide

3. Explain it (child-friendly definition)

“Enormous means *very, very big*.”

4. Give examples

“An elephant is enormous.”

“A mountain is enormous.”

5. Non-example

“A pencil is not enormous. It is small.”

6. Use it in a sentence

“The elephant is enormous.”

Pre-Teaching Vocabulary Before Lessons

What this means - Key words are taught **before** new learning so children:

- Understand the lesson
- Can focus on ideas, not decoding words
- Are more confident participating

This is especially important for:

- Topic vocabulary

- Abstract words
- Story language

Example: Pre-Teaching Before a Science Lesson

Upcoming lesson: Floating and Sinking

Pre-teach words: float, sink, heavy, light

Adults:

- Show pictures or objects
- Demonstrate with water
- Use gestures (up/down)

Adult language:

“This floats.” (hand up)

“This sinks.” (hand down)

During the lesson, children already recognise the words.

Using Pictures, Definitions, and Examples Together

Why this matters - Children need:

- **Meaning** (definition)
- **Reference** (picture/object)
- **Context** (example in a sentence)

Using just one of these is usually not enough.

Example: Emotion Vocabulary

Word: Frustrated

- **Picture:** child struggling with a jigsaw
- **Definition:**

“Frustrated means you feel annoyed because something is tricky.”

- **Example:**

“I feel frustrated when the zip won’t close.”

Adults link words to **real feelings and experiences**.

Word Maps

What they are - Word maps visually organise knowledge about a word:

- What it means
- What it looks like
- How it is used

These are built **with children**, not just displayed.

Example: Word Map – “Predict”

- **Word:** Predict
- **Meaning:** Guess what might happen
- **Picture:** Thinking face / crystal ball
- **Sentence:** “I predict it will rain.”

Adult language:

“We use *predict* when we think about the future.”

Vocabulary Walls

What they are - Vocabulary walls:

- Display **current, useful words**
- Include **pictures and words**
- Are referred to daily, not just decorated

They should be:

- At child eye level
- Organised by topic or theme

Example: Topic Vocabulary Wall – “Materials”

- Wood
- Metal
- Plastic
- Soft
- Hard

Adult language:

“Let’s check the word wall.”

“This is *metal*. Can you find *metal*?”

Children learn that words are **tools for thinking**, not just labels.

Retrieval Games (Making Words Stick)

Vocabulary must be **retrieved**, not just introduced. Games help children:

- Recall words
- Use them aloud
- Enjoy repetition

A. Charades

How it works

- Adult or child acts out the word
- Others guess the word

Best for:

- Verbs (run, creep, stretch)
- Emotions (proud, tired)

Adult language:

“I’m acting *exhausted*. What word is that?”

B. Headbands

How it works

- A word card is placed on a child’s forehead
- Others give clues without saying the word

Example Word: *Enormous*

Clues:

“It’s very big.”

“An elephant can be this.”

C. Vocabulary Bingo

How it works

- Bingo cards show pictures or words
- Adult reads definitions or examples

Adult says:

“This word means very small.”

Children find *tiny*

This supports **listening, retrieval, and meaning**, not just recall.

Using Vocabulary Across the Day

Vocabulary is **reused** beyond discrete lessons.

Examples

- During play:

“That tower is *tall* and *unstable*.”

- During behaviour support:

“I can see you are frustrated.”

- During reflection:

“What did you predict would happen?”

Repeated exposure across contexts helps words **stick**.

Explicit teaching of communication

Turn-Taking - What children need to learn

- Conversation goes back and forth
- Someone speaks, then waits
- Everyone gets a turn

How adults teach it

Adult modelling

“My turn to talk.”

“Now I stop.”

“Your turn.”

Visual support

- Turn-taking cards
- Objects passed around (talking stick, ball)

Everyday examples

Partner talk

“Partner A talks.”

“Partner B listens.”

“Swap.”

Games

- Board games
- Rolling a ball
- Taking turns with equipment

Adults narrate the process:

“You waited. Now it’s your turn.”

Listening Behaviours

What children need to learn - Listening is not just “being quiet.” It includes:

- Looking
- Still body
- Thinking about the speaker

How adults teach it - Adults **teach listening behaviours explicitly.**

Listening checklist

- Eyes looking
- Ears listening
- Body still

Adult language:

“Show me listening.”

“Eyes on me.”

“Body still.”

Everyday examples

Before instructions

“Stop.”

“Look.”

“Listen.”

Circle time adult pauses and says:

“I’m waiting for listening bodies.”

Children learn what listening *looks like*, not just what it is called.

Asking for Help

What children need to learn - Children often:

- Struggle silently
- Use behaviour instead of words

They must be **taught the words and actions for help**.

How adults teach it

Modelled phrases

- “Help please.”
- “I don’t understand.”
- “Can you help me?”

Visual support

- Help cards
- Sentence stems displayed

Everyday examples

Adult models aloud:

“This is tricky. I will ask for help.”

“Help please.”

When a child struggles:

“You can say, ‘Help please.’”

Over time, children replace frustration with communication.

Staying on Topic - What children need to learn

- Conversations have a focus
- Answers should match the question
- It’s okay to bring ideas back on track

How adults teach it

Adults:

- Name the topic
- Gently redirect
- Praise topic-related responses

Adult language:

“We are talking about animals.”

“That’s about cars — let’s come back to animals.”

Everyday examples

Circle time

“The topic is the story.”

“Who can say something about the story?”

Partner talk

- One prompt
- Short time limit

This supports children who find it hard to organise language.

Emotional Language

What children need to learn - Children need words for feelings so they can:

- Express emotions
- Understand others
- Regulate behaviour

How adults teach it

Adults:

- Name emotions as they happen
- Link feelings to situations
- Use visuals and stories

Adult language:

“You look frustrated.”

“You feel proud.”

“I feel disappointed.”

Everyday examples

During conflict

“You feel angry because the toy was taken.”

Reflection time

“How did you feel when you finished?”

Emotion words are taught **before behaviour escalates**, not after.

Structured Talk Approaches Used Every Day

1. Think–Pair–Share

What it teaches

- Thinking time
- Turn-taking
- Listening

How it works

1. Think quietly
2. Talk to a partner
3. Share with the group

Adult language:

“Think.”

“Pair.”

“Share.”

This reduces pressure and improves participation.

2. Circle Time

What it teaches

- Turn-taking

- Listening
- Emotional language
- Staying on topic

Adults model:

“My turn.”

“Your turn.”

“We are listening.”

Visuals and predictable routines make communication safe and structured.

3. Partner Talk

What it teaches

- Speaking in sentences
- Listening to others
- Confidence

Adult scaffolding:

“Tell your partner one thing.”

“Now listen.”

Sentence starters can be displayed:

- “I think...”
- “I like...”

4. Barrier Games

What they are - One child describes something the other cannot see.

What they teach

- Clear speech
- Precise vocabulary

- Listening for meaning

Examples

- Building the same model with blocks
- Drawing from instructions
- Describing a picture behind a screen

Adult support:

“Use words to help your partner.”

“Did that make sense?”

A communication friendly school culture

Calm Visual Displays - What this means

The environment is designed to support **attention and processing**, not overwhelm. Displays are:

- Purposeful
- Uncluttered
- Linked to current learning
- Used by adults and children

Too many colours, fonts, or decorations increase cognitive load and reduce comprehension.

Examples - Communication-friendly:

- Neutral backgrounds
- One clear focus per display
- Vocabulary with images and symbols
- Displays referred to during teaching

Adult language:

“Let’s look at the word board.”

“This picture helps us remember.”

Not communication-friendly:

- Overcrowded walls
- Decorative text adults never reference
- Multiple fonts, colours, and unrelated images

Calm displays help children focus on **language and meaning**, not distraction.

Reduced Background Noise

What this means - Background noise is managed so children can **hear, process, and respond** to spoken language.

This includes:

- Adult awareness of voice levels
- Reduced simultaneous talking
- Quiet transitions
- Thoughtful use of music and audio

Examples

In practice:

- Music off during instructions
- Adults stop talking before giving directions
- One adult speaks at a time
- Soft furnishings used to absorb sound

Adult language:

“I’m going to turn the music off so we can listen.”

“Let’s pause so everyone can hear.”

Children with language or attention needs especially benefit from quieter environments.

Predictable Routines

What this means - Daily routines are **consistent, visual, and referred to explicitly**. Children know:

- What will happen
- In what order
- What is expected of them

Predictability reduces anxiety and frees up mental space for communication.

Example

- Visual timetables used every day
- Same phrases for transitions:

“First tidy, then carpet.”

- Clear start-of-day and end-of-day routines

Adult language:

“Check the timetable.”

“Now is snack. Next is outside.”

Over time, children **internalise the language of routines** and begin to use it themselves.

Consistent Adult Language

What this means

All staff use:

- Similar phrases
- The same key scripts
- Shared expectations for communication

This consistency makes language **predictable and safe** for children.

Examples of shared language

- Attention:

“Stop. Look. Listen.”

- Turn-taking:

“My turn.”

“Your turn.”

- Transitions:

“First... then...”

Even when adults have different styles, **the core language stays the same** across the school.

Praising Communication — Not Just Correctness

What this means

Adults recognise and praise:

- Effort to communicate
- Strategies used (asking, explaining, trying again)
- Communication behaviours, not just right answers

This encourages children to **take risks with language**.

Examples of communication-focused praise

Instead of:

“That’s right.”

Use:

-  “Great explaining.”
-  “Good asking for help.”
-  “You used your words.”
-  “I like how you told your partner.”

-  “Well done for taking turns.”

This tells children **what they did well**, so they can do it again.

Why this matters

When only correctness is praised:

- Confident communicators thrive
- Quieter or less fluent children withdraw

When *communication itself* is praised:

- More children join in
- Language confidence increases
- Behaviour improves

It is important that staff model communication as valuable

In a communication-friendly culture, adults:

- Think aloud
- Model problem-solving with words
- Show that communication is useful and respected

Examples:

“I don’t understand — I will ask.”

“I need help with this.”

“Let me explain my thinking.”

Children learn that **words are tools**, not tests.