

Building Communication-Friendly Classrooms: An Inclusive Approach to SLCN

An inclusive approach for children with Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) means creating communication-friendly classrooms where strategies are embedded universally across teaching and learning, allowing all children to access, participate and succeed. When high-quality universal provision is implemented consistently, many barriers are reduced before they become significant difficulties, decreasing reliance on repeated or reactive interventions led by Teaching Assistants. Instead of TAs being used primarily to compensate for gaps in classroom provision or provide constant individual support, they can be more effectively deployed to deliver targeted interventions, facilitate independence, support specific outcomes and work alongside teachers to strengthen learning. This creates a more sustainable, equitable, and impactful model of support across the school.

Senior leaders should monitor and evaluate universal provision for **Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN)** because communication sits at the centre of learning, behaviour, wellbeing and inclusion. It is not solely a SEND issue — it is a whole-school improvement issue.

Key reasons include:

1. Communication underpins all learning

Children access the curriculum through listening, understanding language, speaking, questioning, and interacting. Weak universal provision can affect:

- Reading comprehension
- Writing development
- Vocabulary acquisition
- Mathematical understanding
- Following instructions
- Participation in lessons

If classroom communication environments are strong, more children can access learning successfully.

2. SLCN is common and often hidden

Many children experience speech, language or communication difficulties that may not be immediately obvious. Some children:

- appear inattentive
- avoid participation

- display challenging behaviour
- struggle socially
- underachieve academically

Without monitoring, needs can be missed or identified late.

3. Universal provision benefits all children

High-quality universal practice is not only for pupils with identified SEND. Examples include:

- visual supports
- clear language
- explicit vocabulary teaching
- processing time
- classroom routines
- opportunities for discussion

These approaches support:

- pupils with SEND
- children with emerging language difficulties
- disadvantaged pupils
- children learning English as an additional language
- all learners

Strong universal provision reduces barriers before specialist intervention becomes necessary.

4. It supports early identification and intervention

Leadership monitoring helps answer:

- Are children being identified early?
- Are staff recognising communication difficulties?
- Are concerns progressing appropriately?
- Are classroom strategies implemented consistently?

Early intervention can reduce later difficulties in literacy, mental health and attainment.

5. Links directly to attendance, behaviour and wellbeing

Children with unidentified communication needs can struggle to:

- regulate emotions
- understand expectations
- express feelings

- form friendships

This can affect:

- behaviour incidents
- exclusions
- anxiety
- attendance
- pupil wellbeing

Monitoring universal provision helps schools address root causes rather than symptoms.

6. It strengthens inclusion and equity

A whole-school approach ensures children are not dependent on individual teachers. Senior leaders can evaluate whether:

- classrooms are communication friendly
- support is consistent
- staff have appropriate training
- vulnerable groups are accessing learning equally

This creates a more inclusive culture.

7. Supports statutory responsibilities

Schools are expected to identify and support SEND under the SEND framework and provide high-quality teaching for all learners. Monitoring universal provision demonstrates:

- graduated response in action
- reasonable adjustments
- evidence-informed practice
- quality first teaching

8. Aligns with school improvement priorities

Improving communication provision can positively influence:

- attainment outcomes
- oracy development
- reading and writing progress
- behaviour
- inclusion
- staff confidence

Leadership learning walks and monitoring can therefore become a school improvement driver rather than a standalone SEND initiative.

Questions senior leaders might ask during monitoring:

- Is language visible in the classroom?
- Are visuals used purposefully?
- Are adults adapting language levels?
- Is vocabulary explicitly taught?
- Are pupils given thinking and processing time?
- Can children explain their learning?
- Are communication opportunities embedded?

Monitoring SLCN universal provision shifts the focus from “fixing individual children” to creating environments where communication and learning can thrive for everyone.