



Towards the Balanced System®: Summary of Impact Evidence

This paper brings together a range of examples from a number of different sources. To date there is no systematic evaluation. I should welcome support for both internal capacity to interrogate outcomes and impact data we have available and external support for an evaluation of system change.

The Core Delivery Principles are the 'how' to achieving the Balanced System Outcomes across the Five Strands and Three Levels. The delivery is driven by the Measuring Impact principle. The Easy Access, Place Based and Continuum of offer principles form the 'engine' for change and the Information principle ensures that practitioners and families have a way of finding the information they need that is relevant to them through the structure of the Outcomes Framework. Easy access, place based delivery and a continuum of offer principles work together to shift the local system.

The 'Easy Access' Core Delivery Principle challenges local areas to find the simplest way of providing access to therapy advice and consultation as possible. There is scope for variation in how this is achieved but the strong suggestion that bringing therapists to places that families access routinely and removing unnecessary barriers to access is critical. The Balanced System is based around population need and not diagnostic categories, therefore the Easy Access principle requires service delivery to be planned in response to population need and open access regardless of the nature of the concern.

There is clear evidence emerging from the implementation of easy access delivery on waiting times for access to therapeutic advice and intervention. It is important to note that this is not about a first contact in isolation but then having a range of options available to the family that are appropriate to the presenting situation and need.

Evidence of the impact of the Balanced System Easy Access approaches, in particular the concept of the open access community-based session to meet a therapist and the school-based access to a link therapist is available from several case examples.

A presentation at the RCSLT 2023 conference outlines the impact of two cases – one showing the immediate impact of introducing an easy access 'drop-in' at Family Hub in Lancashire and the other showing the long term sustainability of the impact in Worcestershire who moved to a Balanced System delivery model for SLT in 2010-2011 as part of their trial as a 'Bercow Pathfinder' which then led to the service being jointly commissioned and full implementation which they have maintained throughout the intervening 15 years. The slide deck and recording can be accessed here:
<https://www.thebalancedsystem.org/downloads/rcslt-conference-presentation-2023/>

Similar patterns have been noted in Kent and Birmingham and this evidence was included in my supplementary evidence to the Education Select Committee
<https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/141895/pdf/>

The SLT lead for East Kent summarises the impact the transformation has had for children and young people in this presentation <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=io94CdNCoAk>

This service was also a pilot site for the Balanced System Prove It! platform. The following extracts from the family responses to attending the Talking Walk In Easy Access sessions provide an indication of the type of data we hope to capture over time as the system automatically provides opportunity for follow up with families that opt into receiving alerts.



The data below is taken from the initial attendance and some follow up data (Part 2) from a small number of families.

Why did you attend the drop-in session?

Tick all that apply

Table data

| Option | Responses | Proportion |
|--|-----------|------------|
| I was concerned about my child's communication | 211 | 74.6% |
| It was suggested by my child's nursery, preschool or other Early Years setting | 139 | 49.1% |
| I wanted to find out more about my child's development | 60 | 21.2% |
| It was suggested by someone from Health Visiting Team | 59 | 20.8% |
| It was suggested by someone else e.g. social worker, GP, parent support group | 32 | 11.3% |
| It was suggested by a family member or friend | 19 | 6.7% |

Tell us anything else that happened

- + Responses
- AI summary

This AI analysis of free text answers used Claude 3.5 Sonnet to summarise comments and identify themes. AI can make mistakes and any information generated should be verified before being used.

Number of responses: 260

1. Staff Interaction and Approach

Staff were consistently described as kind, supportive, welcoming, and professional. Words like "friendly" and "helpful" appeared very frequently. Staff members were praised for their ability to interact naturally with children through play and make both parents and children feel comfortable in the setting.

2. Assessment Methods

Assessment was primarily conducted through play-based observation, with therapists watching and interacting with children in a natural environment. iPad activities were sometimes used to assess comprehension. The crèche/play area setup was specifically mentioned as effective for keeping children relaxed during assessments.

3. Support and Advice

- Parents were frequently given:
- Home-based strategies and tips
 - Information packs to take away
 - Advice on communication techniques
 - Makaton signing resources (mentioned several times)
 - Personalised advice for their child's specific needs

4. Follow-up Care

- Several types of follow-up were mentioned:
- Referrals to other services (including ENT and CCCT)
 - Future appointments scheduled
 - Home visits arranged
 - Nursery/school liaison planned
 - Follow-up assessments (often scheduled for 2-3 months later)

5. Service Effectiveness

- Most feedback was very positive, with only one negative experience reported (regarding wait times and being turned away). Parents frequently reported feeling:
- Reassured
 - Better informed
 - More confident about supporting their child
 - Given clear action plans

6. Resources and Tools

- Specific tools mentioned included:
- Picture cards
 - Makaton signing sheets
 - iPad activities
 - Play-based therapy materials

The overall tone of the feedback suggests a well-regarded service that successfully combines professional expertise with a child-friendly approach, though there are occasional administrative issues with catchment areas and waiting times.

What happened at the drop-in session?

Tick all that apply

Table data

| Option | Responses | Proportion |
|--|-----------|------------|
| I was shown some things I could do at home | 197 | 70.4% |
| I was told where to find more information | 131 | 46.8% |
| I was given information about what to expect for my child's age | 112 | 40% |
| I am going to bring my child for a more detailed assessment with the Speech and Language Therapy Team | 101 | 36.1% |
| I am going to access other support from the Speech and Language Therapy Team e.g. advice session for parents or intervention group | 101 | 36.1% |
| I was given ideas about local sessions I could attend to help with communication e.g. at library or Children's Centre | 95 | 33.9% |



Please share any other feedback about the session.

+ Responses - AI summary

This AI analysis of free text answers used Chat GPT-4 to summarise comments and identify themes. AI can make mistakes and any information generated should be verified before being used.

Number of responses: 214
1. Topic: Feedback on Staff and Support Team

Overall the responses are hugely positive regarding the staff and the support team. The phrases "friendly," "helpful," and "supportive" appeared frequently to describe the team. Many respondents praised the staff for their expertise ("knowledgeable") and for making them and their children feel at ease ("calm", "comfortable", "reassuring"). The team was also commended for being accommodating ("willing to answer any questions", "thorough assessment", "listened to my concerns") and providing useful strategies and tips for language development at home. Communication with the team was praised, with the staff seen as engaging and providing very good feedback. One respondent highlighted a negative experience with misleading timings but overall, users praised the accessibility of these sessions and found it useful to receive advice from a speech & language therapist in person.

2. Topic: Session Environment and Experience

The language sessions were reportedly conducted in a comfortable, welcoming, non-clinical environment which put children at ease and facilitated their natural interaction. A variety of toys and activities were appreciated by users and children. The environment was also stated to be warm and child-friendly, which helped children feel safe and relaxed. Some respondents pointed out that it was a busy setting and it was crowded with many families at times, leading to some feeling overwhelmed.

3. Topic: Impact and Outcomes of Sessions

Users were pleased with the beneficial impact and outcomes of the language sessions. They reported feeling more confident and reassured about their child's speech development, and expressed gratitude for the early intervention strategies provided. Respondents found it beneficial to have individualised support for their child's needs. The mention of 'cue cards', sounds, and language development advice suggested a focus on practical tools and methods. Personal care plans and invitations for further sessions were also highlighted, with several users finding these particularly helpful. Some respondents had previously had private language sessions but appreciated the accessibility and usefulness of these community sessions.

4. Topic: Suggestions and Recommendations

There were a few suggestions put forward - having a booking system to manage the crowd and busyness in sessions, and improving the advertisement of timings on the website and other platforms like Facebook. Despite these few concerns, respondents showed a high degree of willingness to recommend these sessions to others, with many users expressing relief that such support is available.

Part 2

Thanks for attending our Talking Walk-In a few weeks ago. As we have been working to improve support for speech, language and communication needs, we'd really like to know if the Talking Walk-in you attended, (and any support or advice you have accessed as a result) has made a positive difference to you and your child. Please could you spare a few minutes to answer these questions?

What changed following the drop-in session?

What positive changes have you seen in your child's communication skills?

Table data

| Option | Responses | Proportion |
|--|-----------|------------|
| My child has made progress with their talking or understanding | 15 | 83.3% |
| My child is able to communicate more with me and/or other people | 10 | 55.6% |
| My child's attention and listening have improved | 3 | 16.7% |
| My child is more able to join in with activities | 2 | 11.1% |

What has changed for you?

Table data

| Option | Responses | Proportion |
|---|-----------|------------|
| I use strategies that help my child's communication | 17 | 81% |
| I know what to do and where to go for more help | 13 | 61.9% |
| Other family members are also using strategies that help my child's communication | 13 | 61.9% |
| I now have information to help me with my child's communication | 12 | 57.1% |

The RCSLT has recently published a report on waiting times and included a number of case studies of examples of service initiatives that have had a positive impact on access for children and young people. Ten of the fourteen case studies were from services which have been supported using the Balanced System or are in the course of moving towards the delivery model

<https://www.rcslt.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Appendix-2-How-services-are-tackling-waiting-times-in-CYP-services.pdf>



Better Communication

supporting change



More recently, impact reports have been shared internally for the Essex transformation across SLT, Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy provision. The following slides illustrate the significant impact of providing access at place and developing a continuum of offer so that those children and young people who do not require individualised support can be offered the appropriate support immediately whilst 'freeing up' access to more specialist and individualised support for those that need it.

This is an important point to note – the Balanced System is about enabling access to the most effective support to achieve functional outcomes but absolutely includes more specialist support. Furthermore, specialist practitioners within the workforce should actively deliver targeted support alongside the training and support of wider workforce colleagues – specialists 'do' targeted and not all specialist intervention requires a 'specialist' to deliver it – this is a key tenet of the cultural shift that is required in embedding the delivery model.

Some quotes:

Essex July 25: LK (HCRG) shared document that demonstrated reductions waiting list breaches this year compared to 2024. 'the backlog is gone. All of those children that waited over 2 years have gone, they've all been seen. And I think that just shows you how amazing therapy's balanced system is. The colleagues in North Essex have absolutely worked, worked and worked and worked, and I can't tell you describe to you how amazing they've been.'

Essex July 25: Sarah (OT): Sensory Intervention & Impact A number of identified schools have received focused universal and targeted work around sensory input. One Occupational Therapist has shared strong positive feedback from a school where staff were upskilled. This resulted in a significant drop in caseloads (from 14 to just 2–3) and a reduction in sensory referrals, aided by the creation of a Sensory Circuit Club and other self-sustaining strategies.





Balanced System® Scheme for Schools and Settings

The Scheme for Schools and Settings Accreditation has been available since 2015. The Scheme was initially made available on a school by school basis but early learning was that it is more impactful when there is a cohort within a geographical area, both in terms of economies of scale but also the opportunity to facilitate a local community of practice.

In Scotland, one Local Authority used Pupil Equity Funding to facilitate 42% of primary schools to complete the accreditation over a three-year period. The SLT service working with these schools that was also part of a Scottish Government funded pilot of the Balanced System and this service is referred to in a recent RCSLT Scotland report (<https://www.rcslt.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Transforming-support-for-CYP-in-Scotland-Report-August-2025.pdf>) as well as a case example in Equity for All, the report of the Balanced System Understand Phase across Scotland
<https://www.bettercommunication.org.uk/downloads/2022%20Equity%20for%20All%20Final%20for%20Publication.pdf>

In England, Kent County Council has taken a strategic approach to the Scheme for Schools and Settings, initially commissioning support for 60 schools to undertake the scheme followed by a further 40 including early years settings. Local evaluations of the impact of the Scheme have been carried out and are attached as an appendix. Recently a celebration and networking event was held in Kent for both accredited schools and settings and those still undertaking the process to enable sharing and begin a local community of practice. Reports of the event can be found on the following links:

<https://news.kent.gov.uk/articles/kent-schools-celebrated-for-excellence-in-speech,-language-and-communication-support>

<https://news.kent.gov.uk/articles/early-years-settings-named-centres-of-excellence-for-communication>

Summary

We have an emerging evidence picture but need to evaluate more systematically at both the strategic systems change level, the school and settings level and for individual children and families. The Prove It! platform is being used in two sites within the Greater Manchester transformation and also in Birmingham as well as the pilot results referred to from Kent. Essex and Devon are going to be introducing Prove It! over the coming academic year.

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