



The Role of the Speech and Language Therapist in The Balanced System® Link Therapy Model

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What is a Link Speech and Language Therapist?

A link speech and language therapist a named speech and language therapist (SLT) who is assigned to a school. They build a strong relationship with the school and are the lead point of contact in supporting the development of speech, language and communication provision for all including support for children with SLCN.

In collaboration with the SENDCo, they support coordination of the SLT offer to the school to meet the Balanced System® outcomes across all strands and levels of the Balanced System® ([What is it : The Balanced System](#)). The Five Strands are:

- Family Support
- Environment
- Workforce
- Identification
- Intervention

Each of these strands has outcomes at a universal, targeted and specialist level. The resulting High Level Outcomes grid is the core of the Balanced System®. A blank grid known as a scoping document is a key resource in discussing provision and planning with schools.

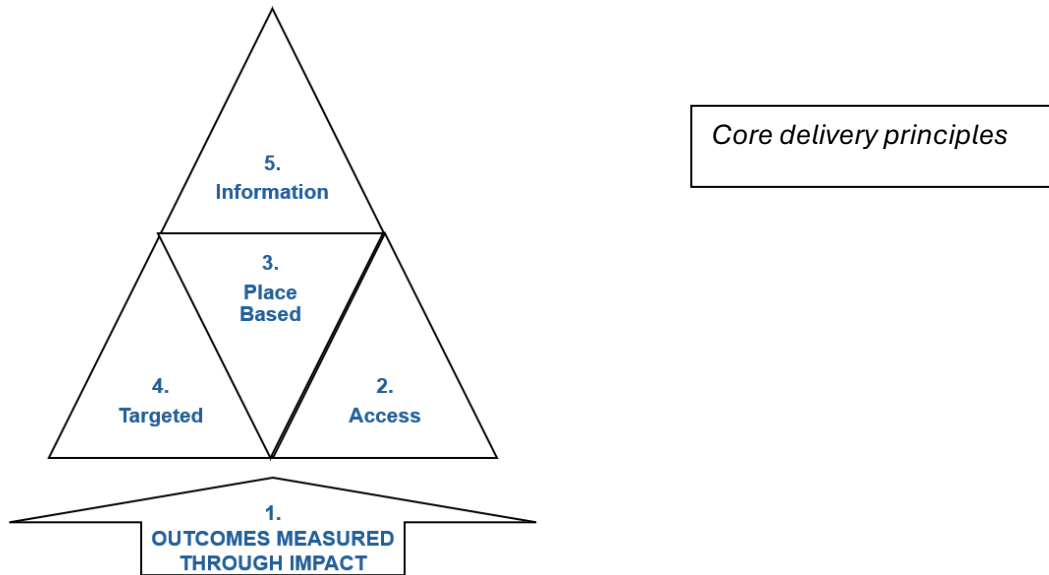
THE BALANCED SYSTEM® HIGH LEVEL OUTCOMES FOR SPEECH, LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION NEEDS



FAMILY SUPPORT	ENVIRONMENT	WORKFORCE	IDENTIFICATION	INTERVENTION
FS3. Specialist - Parents and carers of children with specialist SLCN receive specific specialist support to ensure confidence in their role as a key communication partner for their child and to increase their understanding of the specific communication challenges associated with their child's needs. Young people with SLCN are enabled to be active participants decisions about their support.	EE3. Specialist - Places where children and young people with specialist and complex SLCN spend their time for learning and leisure are communication friendly. The necessary adaptations are in place to maximise access in addition to the enhancements expected at a universal and targeted levels.	WW3. Specialist - Knowledge skills and expertise are developed in identified members of the wider workforce in order to ensure that, working with specialist support, there are staff that are confident and competent to support the delivery of specialist interventions including individual and small group work, support parents, adapt the environment and identify children who need specialist support.	ID3. Specialist - Children with specialist SLCN have their needs identified effectively and quickly. This includes multidisciplinary assessment where appropriate.	IN3. Specialist - Children and young people needing specialist intervention for their SLCN receive appropriate and timely provision in the most functionally appropriate context for their needs. Progress measures will include activity, participation and well-being goals in addition to goals relating to their core SLCN impairment.
FS2. Targeted - Parents and carers of children with identified speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) access additional specific support to ensure confidence in their role as a key communication partner and educational support for their child. Families and young people with SLCN are supported to make choices and access services.	EE2. Targeted - Places where children and young people with identified SLCN spend their time for learning and leisure are communication friendly. Appropriate additional enhancements are made that enable children and young people with identified SLCN to more easily understand and to express themselves.	WW2. Targeted - The wider workforce is supported to develop specific knowledge and skills to support children and young people with identified SLCN. Setting and school staff are confident and competent to deliver targeted interventions, support parents, adapt the environment and identify children who need additional support.	ID2. Targeted - Efficient and accessible processes are in place that support the identification of more specific SLCN. The wider workforce, setting and school staff are supported to be confident and competent to identify children and young people who may require targeted support and/or referral to specialist services for their SLCN.	IN2. Targeted - Children and young people benefiting from targeted interventions will have access to evidence based targeted interventions to develop core speech, language and communication skills delivered in the most appropriate functional context. These might include 1:1 and / or small group interventions that are typically designed by specialist practitioners and delivered by those with appropriate training.
FS1. Universal - All parents and carers are supported with information and resources to encourage their role as effective primary communicative partners for their children. Families and young people are able to make proactive choices with respect to their child's or own needs.	EE1. Universal - Places where children and young people spend their time for learning and leisure are communication friendly. Environments have appropriate enhancements that make it easier for all children and young people to understand and express themselves.	WW1. Universal - The wider workforce is supported to have a good basic understanding of speech, language and communication including supportive strategies. Setting and school staff are confident in their role as facilitators of communication. The wider workforce has access to appropriate training around speech, language and communication.	ID1. Universal - Early identification of children and young people whose speech, language and communication needs may require targeted or specialist support is as efficient and accessible as possible. Preidentification information and advice is available in a given area, school or setting.	IN1. Universal - Homes, settings and schools are supported to develop the language and communication skills of all children and young people through language enrichment and supportive activities.

The Balanced System® Core Delivery Principles

The Core Delivery Principles are the ‘engine’ that drives change towards achieving these high-level outcomes.



Delivery Principle 1: Focus on functional outcomes and measures of impact

The delivery model is underpinned by a focus on delivering functional outcomes – the ‘so what?’ and measuring impact not inputs rising to the ‘Prove It!’ challenge.

The link therapist may contribute to collecting and sharing impact data at several levels including:

- Child and young person outcomes
- Family outcomes
- School, setting, class or group outcomes
- Area cohort outcomes
- Population outcomes



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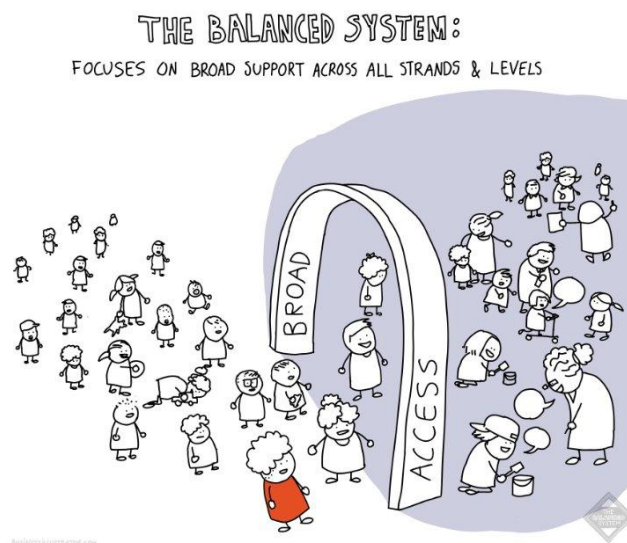
Delivery Principle 2: Access

Simple and easy access to the right information, assessment and support for children, young people and their families

The link therapist contributes to:

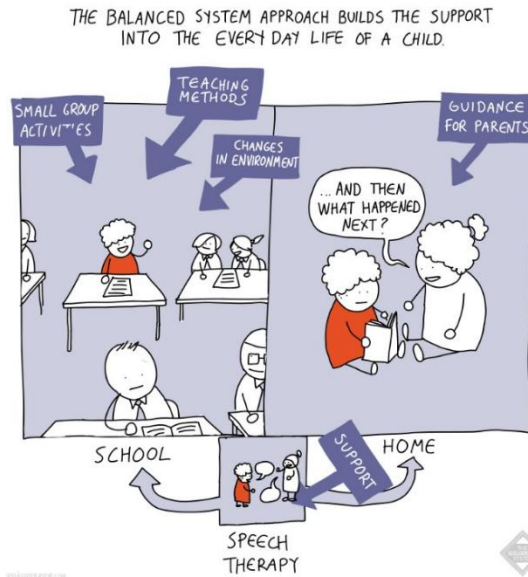
- Early identification as needs emerge at any age
- Easy access to support at the lowest level even if further progression through the system required
- Appropriate assessment through an enquiry-based process, not standard ‘battery’, with the option to signpost to appropriate support that may be part of the whole even if further assessment becomes indicated

All children and young people of school age are assessed in their learning context – the ‘so what?’ is to be able to use SLT expertise to unpick what they need to access the curriculum, be socially integrated with peers and thereby improve social, emotional and mental health and well-being.



Delivery Principle 3: Placed based support

Support is delivered in the most functionally appropriate and relevant place for the child or young person, their development and learning.



The link therapist contributes to:

- SLT resource that is allocated based on need. Schools are allocated SLT time based on their need, relative to the need of the local population. How this resource is used to meet the needs of the school population may differ between settings. For example, a link therapist in one school may focus on developing the knowledge and skills of the workforce and in another school, they may support delivery of targeted groups.
- The link therapist’s time is consolidated by schools and they work regularly as part of the school team.
- Intervention, which is focused on functional outcomes, ideally child and family or young person led, outcomes

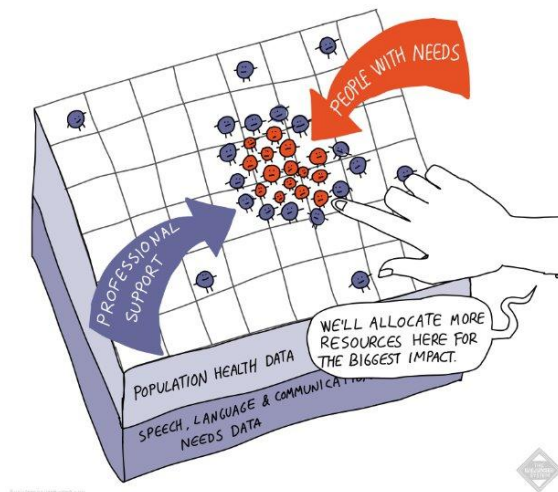
The support needs to be focused on functional outcomes that are the priority for the individual and their family at that time – these may change frequently or stay the same for some time. Support is delivered in the most functionally appropriate and relevant place for the child or young person, their development and their learning.

The Balanced System® tools include resources to plan delivery including:

- School allocation
- Resource allocation
- Profile of needs

School and resource allocation process

THE BALANCED SYSTEM USES DATA FOR
SMARTER ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES.



All schools are banded on a number of key parameters including:

- Ward
- Number on roll
- Free school meals
- SEN
- SEN (SLCN as main need)
- Additional resource provisions

The mean and standard deviation for the schools of X area are then calculated.

Bands:

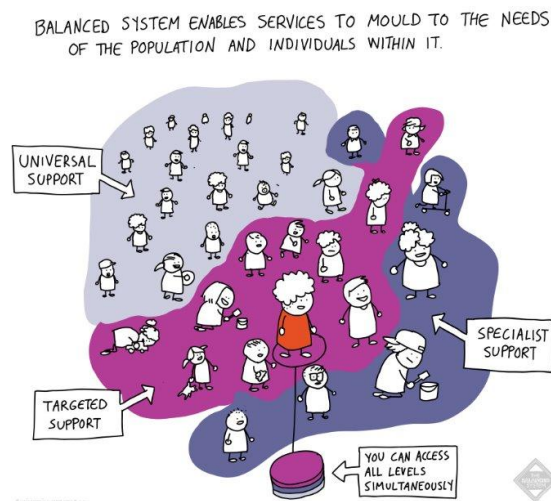
- Very very high
- Very high
- High
- Medium
- Low
- Very low
- Very very low

Resource is allocated based on need. There is a differential in either or both the nature of the offer or the volume of the offer based on evidence of need. Providing a service that aims to deliver equitable outcomes means that the time allocated to schools may vary based on the needs profile of the school population.

The allocated time over the course of a year is inclusive of any provision for that school/population, including parent liaison, workforce development, attending meetings, administrative duties, etc. Resource modelling takes into consideration additional commitments, including absence, mandatory training and leadership time.

Delivery Principle 4: Build the targeted offer as part of the continuum across universal, targeted and specialist levels

The link therapist contributes to the development of strong universal, targeted and specialist provision, ensuring a robust offer across the five strands. This facilitates children accessing a range of support that can, if appropriate, be from any or all of the three levels simultaneously. By taking this flexible approach, a child may access specialist support and be part of a targeted offer whilst the universal context is enhanced through the wider work of the link therapist.



Delivery Principle 5: Information

The link therapist contributes to high quality, accessible and consistent information and advice being available to their school to enable parents/carers and professionals to be well informed. This information should be shared, signposted to, quality assured and impact measured.

Link therapist

A term in the life of...

The link therapist, as the main point of contact for the school will be the primary case holder for children within a school, drawing in colleagues with specific expertise as necessary for elements of some children's provision as necessary. It is crucial for the therapist in this role to develop strong working relationships with the SENDCo, education staff and additional wider workforce who serve the school, to ensure collaborative practice and a shared responsibility in developing the speech, language and communication skills of the children and young people.

All children and young people will benefit from an established link therapy model. Those with identified speech, language and communication needs should be able to access

the appropriate level of support, at the best time and in the most functional place. The provisions may be different, and the demand on the link therapist will vary over time. The effectiveness will be the result of the totality of the offer.

Baseline evaluation

SLCN BASELINE EVALUATION					
	Not at all	Partially	Mostly	Complete	Don't know
AREA	LEVEL 1: INPUT	LEVEL 2: REACH	LEVEL 3: QUALITY	LEVEL 4: IMPACT	
Commissioning / funding	To what extent are all commissioners with a remit for children and young people including the needs of this population in needs assessment and commissioning of their element of children and young peoples' services?	To what extent are commissioners ensuring that their collective activity reaches the full population of children and young people with SLCN?	To what extent are providers delivering services to meet the specifications developed by commissioners as intended?	To what extent has the collective commissioning activity for children and young people yielded demonstrable change in their speech, language and communication skills?	
Integrated workforce	To what extent is the workforce working in an integrated way?	To what extent does an integrated workforce support all pupils with SLCN?	To what extent is the integrated workforce demonstrating high quality collaborative working?	To what extent is the integrated workforce impacting on the wider community?	
Engaging family and carers	To what extent are services for children and young people with SLCN engaging with parents in support of their children's SLCN?	To what extent are parental engagement strategies and activities reaching all parents of pupils with SLCN?	To what extent is parental engagement consistently of high quality?	To what extent are improved parental participation and confidence in supporting children and young peoples' SLCN demonstrated?	
Leadership and management	Is there leadership and management of provision across agencies and disciplines?	Are the leadership and management arrangements facilitating services to reach all children with SLCN as appropriate?	Is the leadership and management of high and consistent quality?	Does the leadership and management contribute to achieving improved speech, language and communication skills for children and young people with SLCN?	
Training and development	Is there a range of training and development on offer to parents and the workforce?	Is the training and development accessible in terms of funding, time, location?	Is the training and development of high and consistent quality?	Does the training and development result in improved skills to support children and young people with SLCN?	

Key considerations include co-developing guidance for:

- Functional outcomes from the outset
 - Measuring, collating and sharing impact data across the five strands and three levels: how to capture key voices ie children and young people, parents/carers, workforce, etc.
- Case studies, parental feedback, review and update evaluations
- Consent: parental consent to be gained prior to sharing of any identifiable information
- How to streamline current local policies whilst ensuring fidelity to the Balanced System® model

Operational delivery

Link therapists will be allocated time per academic year (see *School and resource allocation process*). Therapists and schools should have a shared understanding of roles and responsibilities in meeting the speech, language and communication needs of the children and young people. Coproduction of this model of delivery is essential in providing an effective, whole-system provision for speech, language and communication within the school.



Initial discussions

Outcome: Clear foundations of link therapy relationship	
Process: Phone call, Teams or face to face discussion	
SLT action: SLT requires knowledge of service wide agreement of link therapy role in the context of The Balanced System	School action: SENDCo to develop understanding of The Balanced System framework
Pre-sharing of any local guidance re link therapy provision	Consider local guidance re link therapy provision and prepare to ask questions
Impact: SLT and SENDCo have a common framework through which to understand, plan and deliver support for children and young people	Measure: Evidence of examples of shared use of language, positive examples of planning together

Outcome: Drivers and barriers to successful joint working identified	
Process: Phone call, Teams or face to face discussion	
SLT action: SLT competence and confidence with using, sharing and guiding school staff through the tools	School action: SENDCo to complete <i>stars, bugs and moon, baseline evaluation and detailed evaluation</i>
Support SENDCo in completing tools as required	SENDCo to share completed PDFs with link SLT prior to initial termly meeting
Impact: SLT and SENDCo have a shared understanding of school specific opportunities and challenges	Measure: Evidence of shared use of Baseline evaluation tools that inform planning and problem solving



Outcome: Strengths and gaps in SLC and SLCN provisions identified within the school/setting	
Process: Complete baseline capture of current provisions using the scoping document (across the Balanced System five strands and three levels) Scoping document available here: https://www.thebalancedsystem.org/balanced-system-tools/	
SLT action: SLT to feel confident and competent in sharing scoping tool and in identifying strands and levels of support and provision across the school context SLT to work through examples of mapping provisions with SENDCo	School action: SENCo to complete scoping of provisions using five strands and three levels, with support from link SLT as required SENDCo to share completed scoping with school staff to build shared understanding and language
Impact: SLT and SENDCo to develop a shared understanding of current whole school provisions to support SLC and SLCN	Measure: Evidence of shared use of The Balanced System scoping tool to inform planning of support from the link therapist and school focus



Termly planning meetings

Outcome: Link therapist and SENDCo jointly manage SLC and SLCN for the school population	
Process: Termly face to face planning meetings, prior to start of new term. Completion of following table of outcomes	
SLT action: Link SLT to contact SENDCo to arrange	School action: SENDCo to ensure attendance at, and prepare for meetings
Impact: SLT and SENDCo have a shared understanding of link therapist outcomes and agreed SLC and SLCN focus in context of whole school priorities, using five strands and three levels	Measure: Evidence of examples of shared outcomes and language, through a joint plan

Outcome: Strengths and gaps of whole school speech, language & communication provisions updated and current	
Process: Update scoping	
SLT action: Link SLT to review scoping document prior to meeting	School action: SENDCo to have updated and shared mapping of current provisions, using scoping document, with their link SLT prior to meeting
SLT to be aware of provisions across five strands and three levels and feel confident in identifying accurate strands and levels of provisions	Jointly identify and prioritise any gaps in provisions for SLC and SLCN
Jointly identify and prioritise any gaps in provisions for SLC and SLCN	
Impact: SLT and SENDCo have a shared understanding of current whole school provisions to support SLC and SLCN	Measure: Evidence of updated and shared use of The Balanced System scoping tool to inform planning of support from the link therapist and school focus



Outcome: Easy access to the service for children with potential SLCN	
Process: Joint planning of school-based opportunities Individual child discussions	
<p>SLT action: Link SLT and SENDCo to jointly plan and hold regular opportunities for parents & carers and wider school workforce to share and discuss any concerns</p> <p>Link SLT to support, where appropriate deliver, and quality assure, universal and targeted provisions that children (regardless of ‘known to SLT’ status) can access</p> <p>SLT to review paperwork, apply decision-making and inform impact frameworks</p> <p>Joint decision making on best next steps for each child</p>	<p>School action: SENDCo to create an information pack for school workforce, parents and carers, signposting to advice and outlining how/where/when there are opportunities to liaise with link SLT</p> <p>SENDCo to identify universal and targeted opportunities within the school</p> <p>Ensure clear ‘request for help’ process, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SENDCo to produce list of children with up-to-date paperwork - Detailing required interventions (across the five strands) prior to making request and any impact on the child/their need - Parental questionnaire including consent - Up to date IEP/EHCP - Other professional reports where applicable <p>Joint decision making on best next steps for each child</p>
Impact: All children have the right support in the right context at the right time. Families are supported to develop their child’s speech, language and communication development and needs.	Measure: Evidence of child and parent voice, capturing the ‘so what’ and what has changed for them, because of the support accessed.



Outcome: All children with SLCN having their needs met in a functional context	
Process: Individual child discussions Service delivery	
SLT action: Link SLT will carry out functional assessments as deemed appropriate	School action: SENDCo will support assessment by providing up to date paperwork and coordinating opportunities within the school
Link SLT will implement, run and/or monitor individual and/or group interventions	SENDCo will oversee interventions and ensure school commitment to and ownership of these provisions
Link SLT will provide training to workforce as required	SENDCo will identify training needs and work with link SLT to provide opportunities to upskill workforce
Link SLT to bring knowledge and awareness of wider service provisions, for example rolling program of training opportunities, or environmental audit tool, to maximise efficiencies across the service	
Impact: All children will have their needs identified and supported in a functionally appropriate and timely way enabling them to make progress and develop confidence in their skills	Measure: Evidence of child and school staff voice, capturing the ‘so what’ and what has changed for them, because of the support accessed.



Outcome:	
Process or activities:	
SaLT action:	School action:
Impact:	Measure:

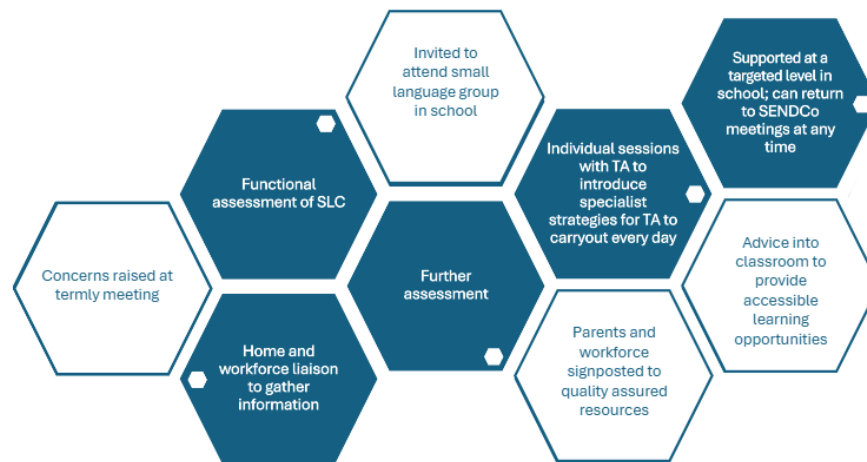


A simple outcomes and activity table may provide a scaffold for discussion.

Outcome	Activity	Achieved Y / N
<i>e.g. for children to be independent in making a choice for Special Time play</i>	<i>e.g. visual choices on all staff lanyards</i>	<i>e.g. Y</i>

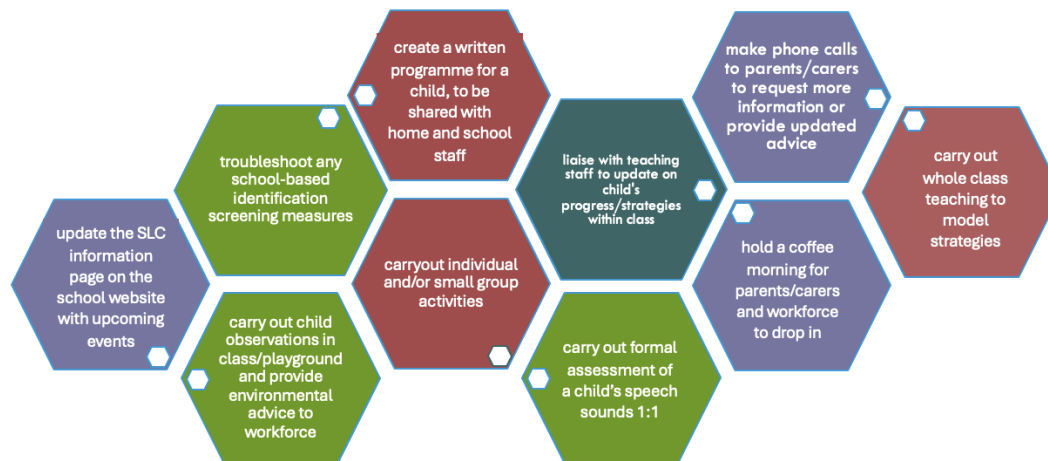
Delivery of provisions/journey for the child

Outcome: for children to have their needs identified early; and to experience the most efficient route to the required level of support. For example:



A day in the Life of...

Every day in the role of a link SLT will differ; the needs of the school population will change; and the demand of the link SLT will fluctuate over time. In a visit, a therapist may carry out some of the activity as outlined below.



Link therapy at five strands and three levels to meet the 15 High Level Outcomes of The Balances System®

The fifteen high level outcomes are summarised below. This provides a scaffold for schools and settings to consider the outcomes of provision across the five strands and three levels. Schools and settings can map their current provisions into the Mapping Tool to identify areas of success and any gaps in provision. The link therapist can work with the SENDCo to complete this activity. It is recommended that mapping is refreshed termly to reflect progress in moving towards the high-level outcomes.

Strand	Outcome by level
Family Support	<p>S: Families of children with more complex SLCN access specific information and advice in school</p> <p>T: Families of children with SLCN access information and advice in school</p> <p>U: Information shared with families by school about language and learning development and support</p>
Environment	<p>S: Specialist bespoke adaptations to the environment in place as necessary</p> <p>T: Adapted visual timetables deployed to support specific activities</p> <p>U: Whole school communication environment audit and action plan to build consistency</p>
Workforce	<p>S: Some staff have received training to support more complex SLCN</p> <p>T: Communication Champions/ key staff in schools have training to support colleagues with targeted interventions</p> <p>U: ALL school staff (including teaching and non-teaching staff) have basic training around speech, language and communication development and needs and strategies to support</p>
Identification	<p>S: SLT assessment in school context, can be functional and/or standardised assessment</p> <p>T: SENCO uses appropriate classroom observation tool to support identification of SLCN & possible request for further advice</p> <p>U: SENDCo & Class Teachers confident to identify children where SLCN a possible concern</p>
Intervention	<p>S: Individualised specialist intervention in school for a range of SLCN</p> <p>T: Targeted interventions for high frequency SLCN available on a rolling basis by SaLT and/or school staff</p> <p>U: Universal strategies for supporting SLC development in all classrooms and learning contexts</p>

Below is an example of how a large mainstream primary school setting in Worcestershire delivers provision across the five strands and three levels, to support the speech, language and communication needs of its children and young people.

	FAMILY SUPPORT	ENVIRONMENT	WORKFORCE	IDENTIFICATION	INTERVENTION
SPECIALIST			SLTA on the job training for TAs	Multi-agency assessments e.g. ASD diagnosis	Specialist interventions for a few children
TARGETED	Parent Evenings with SLT and SENCO Intervention Fayre			SLT assessments at school Liaison meetings with SENCO	Rolling programme of targeted interventions throughout the key stages
UNIVERSAL	 Concept of the Week or Word of the Week	 SLCN Pathway	 Language for Learning supporting pupils with communication difficulties Every Child a Talker Worcestershire	 SLCN Pathway Language for Learning supporting pupils with communication difficulties	 Language for Learning supporting pupils with communication difficulties

Measuring Impact

The link therapist, in collaboration with the SENDCo, must ensure consideration is given to measuring outcomes and impact for the children and young people, regardless of any identified need. The Balanced System® describes four levels in which to measure data. All have their place and should be included, however, most pertinent is the impact data: are we making a difference to individuals, to groups and to the population that we serve? Further detail on measuring impact can be found on the [Balanced System® Prove It! Platform](#).

THE BALANCED SYSTEM® OUTCOME FRAMEWORK

	QUANTITY	QUALITY
EFFORT	LEVEL 1 INPUT HOW MUCH DID WE DO? TRADITIONAL MEASURES OF ACTIVITY AND INPUTS	LEVEL 3 IMPLEMENTATION HOW WELL DID WE DO IT? MEASURING WHETHER THE INPUTS WERE OF A HIGH QUALITY
EFFECT	LEVEL 2 REACH IS ANYONE BETTER OFF? MEASURING ACCESS TO THE INPUTS DELIVERED	LEVEL 4 IMPACT DID IT MAKE A DIFFERENCE? FOR THE INDIVIDUAL? FOR A GROUP? FOR A POPULATION

Glossary

Key Word	Description
Agent of change	Identified person(s) within the school/setting to work collaboratively with the link therapist, to support speech, language and communication within the school/setting, for individual children and/or the population of the school/setting.
High level outcomes	15 outcome descriptors to deliver to in a Balanced System® service delivery model.
Intervention	Evidence based support for a child/young person to support in achieving their functional communication outcomes. This may take the form of individual, group or indirect strategies.
Link therapist	The named speech and language therapist for a school/setting, to work as part of the school workforce, providing advice and support across the five strands and three levels for all children/young people in the school/setting.
Prove It! platform	A mechanism to capture evidence of impact and outcomes across four levels; input, reach, quality and impact
Resource allocation tool	Tool to formulate equitable provision for ranked schools/settings across an identified footprint, given the available workforce resource.
School allocation tool	Triangulation of national population/demographic data with local knowledge to rank schools/settings from very very high, to very very low need.
The Balanced System	A strategic, outcomes-based, whole system framework and suite of tools and templates that can be used to improve the commissioning and delivery of services which benefit from an integrated approach to delivering outcomes for children and young people.

Resources/further reading

[2024 04 25 example of a link therapist in school](#)

[2025 Danny's journey updated](#)

Mainstream [Description of role of link speech and language therapist in mainstream primary school](#)



Special Education [Balanced System for Schools and Settings - a school's journey - YouTube](#)