Communication and Language Strategy

As one of our unswerving focuses, we recognise the importance of developing children's communication and language skills. As a prime area, communication and language underpins all other areas of learning and more than that, is essential for thinking, expressing our feelings, making friends and finding solutions to conflicts. It is therefore one of the strongest predictors of later development through life and must be prioritised.

We have identified 5 key ingredients we use to create a language-supporting day within our setting.

Positive Interactions

High quality interactions are vital to develop speech and language skills. They allow children to hear new vocabulary in context, practise using language within social interactions and receive feedback on their communication and language. Feedback is most powerful when it is responsive and adaptive and requires highly skilled practitioners who have a good understanding of each child's needs. It is important to define what a positive interaction should look like in order to dispel the misconception that adults firing closed questions at children equates to positive interactions. Instead we follow an evidence informed strategy known as the **ShREC approach**:

- First, we **share attention** with the child. This will involve observing them and their play to give attention to what they do and what they say. Sensitively joining in with their play motivates children to communicate freely with us.
- The second stage is to **respond**. This response will depend on our knowledge of the child and their individual development. It involves not only verbal responses but also paying attention to non-verbal communications such as giving eye contact, nodding and smiling.
- The third stage is to **expand**. This is where modelling and scaffolding begins with the adult pitching their language just above the level of the child. This stage provides two vital opportunities for developing communication and language skills. It allows adults to teach and model new vocabulary and also to teach and model language structures.
- The last stage is **conversation** and it is here that we seek back and fourth interactions. As children's conversational skills develop, we can sensitively challenge children, shaping the conversation to incorporate more abstract topics that are removed from the here and now. It is in this stage that questions may be used sparingly and should involve open ended questions.

Songs, rhymes and poems

Songs, rhymes and poems provide a great opportunity to develop communication and language. When sharing these with children, we draw attention to rhyme pausing for children to predict the next rhyming word and encouraging them to create their own rhymes or clap out the beats in words. We have set out a clear progression document detailing which **songs, rhymes and poems** will be taught when.

Daily shared reading

Books are one of the most powerful tools in language development. They contain a much richer variety of vocabulary and also more complex grammar structures than would be used in every day conversations. It is therefore vital that we utilise their potential fully. Shared reading with children is most powerful when it is interactive. When reading with children we read expressively, emphasising any rhyme or rhythm in the story. We pause to explain any unfamiliar vocabulary and ask questions to check comprehension. Children hear stories every day and also participate in **small group reading sessions** three times per week through their phonics reading sessions.

Teaching vocabulary

The teaching of vocabulary occurs implicitly throughout the day through positive interactions but also must be explicit, deliberate and planned for. We use high quality texts to introduce tier two vocabulary through the use of our **word wizard**. After reading our book, word wizard shares new words each day from the book which he finds in his basket. We teach this new vocabulary in a structured way, ensuring children can repeat the word, hear it in context, understand the definition and can use the word in their own sentences. We then revisit this word explicitly by re-reading the text throughout the week and implicitly by using it in our every day classroom interactions, to ensure that children transfer this new vocabulary into their long term memory.

Supporting environment

We recognise that developing communication and language skills requires not only careful teaching of the skills, but also relies on us providing ample opportunities and motivation for the children to practise these skills. Throughout our environment we regularly identify **communication hotspots** and enhance these areas by providing resources to engage children through meaningful, child led activities. For example an outdoor hut may become a role play area encouraging collaborative talk, telephones and message pads may be added to give purpose to talk. In teaching sessions we incorporate **learning conversations**, **stem sentences** and **modelling** to support children to verbalise their learning.

Monitoring and assessment

In order to secure good progress in communication and language for every child, it is necessary to carefully monitor and track their progress. As one of our unswerving focuses, we **track attainment in communication and language every half term**. From this, we swiftly identify any children requiring further support in this area. Depending on needs, that support may include **targeted adult interactions** in the provision, **Time to Talk** small group interventions, or referrals to **speech and language services**. We also monitor attainment daily through our careful observations and use these to quickly adapt our environment, activities and teaching strategies to enable us to provide the best possible ingredients to meet the needs of all children.