



Supporting The Balanced System® in Schools

Working with a Link Therapist

Version 1: September 2023, compiled by KCC SLCN Leads in consultation with Better Communication CIC and local stakeholders

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<u>Glossary</u>
SENCo – Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
SLC – Speech, Language and Communication
SLCN – Speech, Language and Communication Needs
SLT – Speech & Language Therapist



1. About the Balanced System® and Kent

In Kent, we have adopted the Balanced System® Framework to make sure that the right provisions are available for parents, carers and professionals to help children and young people develop their speech, language and communication skills. We work together as a whole system which includes health visitors, early years settings, schools, specialist teaching services as well as speech and language therapy services.

Kent's commitment to inclusive practice is outlined in [A Countywide Approach to Inclusive Education \(kelsi.org.uk\)](#). Priority 3 states that *'inclusive education is part of a broader, holistic, and joined up offer of support'* and the [Mainstream Core Standards \(kelsi.org.uk\)](#) describe an expectation that *'staff collaborate and have effective links with other relevant outside agencies and specialists'* - the Balanced System® framework facilitates us to work up in a joined-up, collaborative and impactful way.

The Balanced System® Framework is organised into five strands (outcome areas) and across three levels. The ambition within each school is to have a range of provisions that can ensure that outcomes are met in each of the five strand areas at universal, targeted and specialist levels.

THE BALANCED SYSTEM®

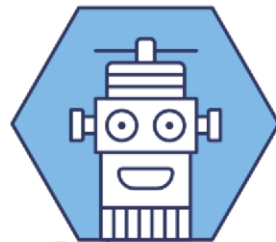




Five Strands



Family Support



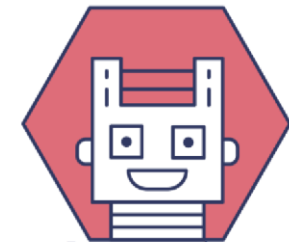
Environment



Workforce



Identification



Intervention

Family Support: Parents have the confidence, knowledge and skills to support their role as a key communicative partner for their child.

Environment: Environments are enhanced to support children to understand and express themselves effectively.

Workforce: The workforce is confident and competent to support children with speech, language and communication needs.

Identification: Speech, language and communication needs are identified early and effectively.

Intervention: Children receive support to help them make progress in their speech, language and communication.

Universal, targeted and specialist (or individualised)



Universal outcomes and the provisions that help deliver them support all pupils within your school to develop their speech, language and communication skills.

Targeted outcomes and resources are more directly useful for pupils and their families where there is a concern about speech, language and communication or a need has been identified already. For the majority of pupils and their families, this level will provide enough support. Targeted provisions may be delivered by school staff who have received specific training as well as by speech and language therapists where appropriate. Targeted provisions may be of benefit to pupils with complex SLCN as part of their wider support.

Specialist or individualised outcomes and resources are either to support more complicated speech, language and communication needs or to provide more specialist information and help. Some pupils and their families will need specialist level support as well as targeted and universal levels for them to make the progress they wish to make with speech, language and communication. Specialist level may not be needed all of the time and may be helpful at certain points on a child or young person's journey.



2. What is a link therapist?

A link therapist is a named speech and language therapist who builds a relationship with a school and supports the school to develop SLC provision at the universal, targeted and specialist levels. This way of working will improve outcomes for all children and enable children to access support at the right level at the right time. The link therapist supports the Balanced System® principle of place-based support, meaning that support is delivered in the most functionally appropriate and relevant place for the child or young person, for their development and learning.



The link therapist is the lead point of contact for the school around any of the speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) of children across the school. Link therapist time is allocated based on need, so schools with higher levels of SLCN are likely to require more time than schools with lower levels of need. This provides opportunities for the link therapist to use their expertise to meet need through appropriate support across the five strands. This will enable pupils to **access the curriculum**, be **socially integrated with peers** and thereby **improve mental health and well-being**. Support is focussed on **functional outcomes**, ideally lead by the child/young person and their family.

3. What to expect

Initial link therapist meeting:

Before (or during) your initial meeting, your link therapist will ask you (SENCo, headteacher) to use the free Balanced System® tools to support the school to self-evaluate provision for speech, language and communication and how outcomes are achieved.

Access the free tools at <https://www.thebalancedsystem.org/balanced-system-tools/> by registering your name, email address, job title and organisation (school). This will enable you to download reports.



Tools available to schools to support understanding and informing practice and provision:

School Baseline Evaluation:

This is typically completed by the senior leadership team and follows the structure of the Balanced System® framework

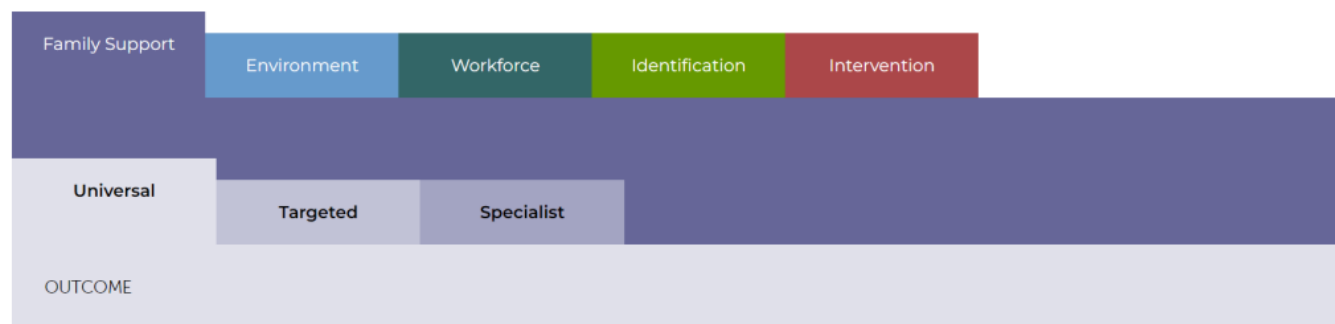
- Commissioning/funding (e.g. this could include funding for specific roles such as specialist speech and language teaching assistants or subscriptions to SLCN support packages the school has invested in)
- Integrated workforce – how different professionals work together to support speech, language and communication
- Parent and carer engagement
- Leadership and management
- Training and development

For each area, questions are structured into levels of evidence to support thinking about what happens and ultimately the intended IMPACT):
Level 1: Input – what we are doing?; Level 2: Reach – is anyone better off?; Level 3: Implementation quality – how well did we do it?; Level 4: Impact – did it make a difference?

School Detailed Evaluation:

This is typically completed in collaboration between senior leadership and staff supporting SLC in the classroom.

It supports you to consider provision across the 5 strands and 3 levels. It is presented like a filing cabinet – so for each strand, you will answer questions about universal, targeted and specialist provisions.



Outcome:

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.



The school should share their evaluations with the link therapist prior to the meeting (e.g. by attaching them to an email).

*(NB: If your school is working towards Balanced System® Scheme for Schools and Settings Accreditation, you will **not** need to access free tools as you will already have access to these tools in your account and can share from here).*

During the link therapist meeting with a school's senior leadership

- Use '**Stars, moons and bugs**' tool to support discussion about the school's strengths and areas for development to support speech, language and communication.
- Use the **Mapping provision** template to capture what is currently provided and identify gaps in SLC provision. The **integrated solution tool** can be used provide examples of how outcomes can be achieved – this will help the school and link therapist develop a plan for the coming term(s).
- Considering the five strands and three levels of The Balanced System®, **agree an action plan** to summarise what needs to happen, who is responsible and the expected impact. This may include involvement from other professionals in addition to school staff and the link therapist. This can be recorded on your Link Therapist Meeting Record paperwork.
- During further link therapist meetings, the school will review and update the action plan as provision develops.

Individual pupils

The school will use the link therapist meeting to discuss individual pupils where appropriate. This could be pupils for whom staff or parents/carers have a concern and would like to seek advice. Together with the link therapist, and specialist teacher if present, staff will agree a plan including universal or targeted provisions offered by the school, alongside more specialist provisions as appropriate.



Top tips:

- Look at the tools and resources *before* meeting with the link therapist and complete the baseline and detailed evaluations. This will ensure the meeting is focussed, productive and informed.
- Allow enough time – the initial link therapy meeting is likely to take at least 1.5 hours.
- Where possible, invite the specialist teaching and learning service (STLS) to also attend the meeting with the link therapist. This will help to ensure the action plan is supported by a multidisciplinary approach.
- Use the [Mainstream Core Standards](#) and associated SLCN guidance to help identify gaps and plan provision developments for the school, and to consider support provided for individuals or groups of pupils.

Follow up support

- Dates for follow up meetings and visits will be agreed - the frequency of meetings will depend on the size and level of need within the school.
- The action plan/meeting record will clearly state the agreed actions to be completed and by whom, the timeframe for completion and the outcomes to be achieved.

4. What are the school's responsibilities?

- To commit to developing provision as agreed within the action plan across all five strands and three levels of The Balanced System® and agreeing timings and feedback processes.
- Implement a clear communication plan to parents/carers informing them of the link therapist approach. Information could be provided on the school website as well as in newsletters. Here is some suggested wording:

“Speech, Language and Communication development are important life skills. They are linked to learning, attainment, behaviour, social and emotional development as well as mental wellbeing.



We are committed to supporting the speech, language and communication development of all our pupils. We are working in partnership with our NHS link speech & language therapist [insert name] as well as specialist teachers to continue to improve our practice and provision and help to ensure that all our children reach their potential. Your child may therefore come into contact with [insert link therapist's name] within their classroom or around school.

If you have any concerns about your child's speech, language or communication skills, please speak to your child's class teacher in the first instance. We will then work together with you to agree next steps.

You will be kept informed about any plans to support your child.

- Ensure that parents know who to talk to if they have a concern about their child's speech, language and communication needs.
- Explore and agree with the link therapist the most effective way to support parents/carers and staff e.g. drop-in advice sessions, workshops, modelling of approaches, mentoring.
- Ensure **informed verbal consent is provided by parents/carers for any pupil they wish to discuss with the link therapist**. This should include consent to share personal data (name/address/DOB) as necessary.
- Ensure parents/carers are informed of the outcome of the discussion with the link therapist.
 - Where the therapy service is providing direct assessment or intervention to a specific pupil, the therapist is responsible for communicating directly with the parent the outcome of the assessment/ intervention. In all other circumstances the school should take the lead in communicating with parents to ensure they are aware of their CYP needs and how they are being met.
- Maintain pupil records including a record of any child-specific advice provided, implemented and impact.



5. What are the link therapist's responsibilities?

- To commit to developing provision as agreed within the action plan across all five strands and three levels of The Balanced System® and agreeing timings and feedback processes.
- Complete the Link Therapy Meeting Record. Provide a PDF copy to the school within 1 week of the meeting. Ensure the record is saved on the therapy service shared drive and stored for 2 years.
- Record discussions about specific pupils who have been known to the service but may or may not have an open episode of care on the patient record system.
- Record discussions about specific pupils which lead to opening an episode of care on the patient record system.
- Gain informed verbal consent from the parent/carer to book an appointment to carry out the observation / assessment/ intervention that has been agreed.
- Communicate directly with the parent/carer the outcome of any assessment/ intervention including next steps.

Joint Assessment / Intervention

- Where appropriate, the link therapist will sign-post the school/parent to information on our Children and Young People's Therapy Service website regarding support available for other areas of need.
- With parent/carer consent, the Link Therapist may talk directly to an Occupational Therapy (OT) or Physiotherapy (PT) colleagues regarding specific cases. Should a decision be made to refer to OT or PT, the Link Speech and Language Therapist will complete an internal referral form and submit as per the current system. A joint meeting/ assessment or therapy session may be arranged as required.
- School must refer directly via the current on-line portal to OT and PT if the CYP is not open to SLT/ has no SLCN.



6. Measuring impact

The Balanced System® is underpinned by a focus on delivering **functional outcomes** – the ‘so what?’. As a result the focus will be on measuring **impact**.

To help inform this review the link therapist, in partnership with staff, may include:

- a) case studies to show what has happened over the year to develop provision for speech, language and communication and what the functional impact has been. Themes for case studies could be, for example:
 - work to develop parent and carer engagement including feedback about how this has made a difference to them and their child
 - impact of environmental changes to children’s communication and interaction
 - impact of staff development activities and reflection on the functional differences they have noticed in the classroom
 - impact of identifying speech, language or communication needs and changes because of this
 - how a range of provisions have met the needs of individual pupils and what difference it has made in terms of functional outcomes
- b) Complete ‘Prove it’ surveys to gather the ‘so what’ of an activity
- c) Gather feedback from parents/carers highlighting how the support has made a difference to their child’s communication and interaction
- d) Review and update the Baseline and Detailed Evaluations to capture progress made.