

Thank you for the opportunity to submit late evidence to the above inquiry. The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) is the professional body for speech and language therapists, speech and language therapy students and support workers working in the UK. Our comments are based on the experience and expertise of our members, who work with children and young people with behavioural difficulties, including within Education Otherwise than at School provision. Our evidence focuses primarily on the first topic area within the terms of reference namely;

- Reasons for and support available for children and young people at risk of EOTAS, including through their exclusion from mainstream provision;

We are keen to highlight to the committee the growing research base on the unidentified speech, language and communication needs of children and young people excluded from mainstream provision. There is compelling evidence on the link between behavioural difficulties and unsupported language and communication needs with recent research revealing that **81%** of children with formally identified emotional and behavioural disorders have significantly below average language abilities.¹ Given this evidence, we are very concerned at the paucity of speech and language therapy support within EOTAS provision and would welcome committee consideration of the issues our response raises.

We would be delighted to provide further information to the committee if this would be of benefit.

¹ Hollo, A, Wehby, J.H. and Oliver, R.M. (2014). Unidentified Language Deficits in Children with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders: A MetaAnalysis. *Exceptional Children*, 80(2), 169-186.

Evidence from the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists to the Children, Young People and Education Committee Inquiry into Education Otherwise than at School (EOTAS)

1. Reasons for and support available for children and young people at risk of EOTAS, including through their exclusion from mainstream provision;

Reasons for exclusion

- i. Estyn thematic reports on EOTAS in 2015² and 2016³ confirmed that the primary reason for pupils receiving their education through EOTAS provision is challenging behaviour associated with social and emotional behavioural difficulties. Research shows that many children and young people who are excluded or at risk of exclusion have behavioural difficulties which co-occur with communication needs that are often unidentified and unsupported. For example:
 - **Two thirds** of pupils at risk of permanent exclusion from a mainstream secondary school have language difficulties.⁴
 - **81%** of children with formally identified emotional and behavioural disorders have significantly below average language abilities⁵
 - Evidence from England suggests has revealed that **77.1%** of children in alternative provision academies, alternative provision free schools and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) in England have an identified additional learning need or disability.⁶
- ii. Without support, communication needs can impact on pupils in EOTAS provision in a variety of important ways:

² Estyn (2015) *Education other than at school: a good practice survey*. [pdf] Cardiff: Estyn. Available online at: https://www.estyn.gov.wales/sites/www.estyn.gov.wales/files/documents/Education_other_than_at_school_a_good_practice_survey_-_June_2015.pdf Accessed on: 4 March 2020

³ Estyn (2016) *Education Other Than at School*. [pdf] Cardiff: Estyn. Available online at: <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/sites/www.estyn.gov.wales/files/documents/EOTAS%20remit%20report.pdf> Accessed on: 4 March 2020

⁴ Clegg, J., Stachhouse, J., Finch, K., Murphy, C. and Nicholls, S. (2009). Language abilities of secondary age pupils at risk of school exclusion: A preliminary report. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 25(1), 123– 139.

⁵ Hollo, A, Wehby, J.H. and Oliver, R.M. (2014). Unidentified Language Deficits in Children with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders: A MetaAnalysis. *Exceptional Children*, 80(2), 169-186.

⁶ Department for Education, England (2018). *Creating opportunity for all: Our vision for alternative provision*. [Online]. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/713665/Creating_opportunity_for_all_-_AP_roadmap.pdf

- **Education:** Communication needs can prevent pupils from engaging with lessons which are delivered through spoken language, as well as having difficulties with aspects of school life such as following timetables and completing homework.
- **Relationships:** Communication needs can make it more difficult for pupils to form friendships, and put them at greater risk of peer problems and bullying.⁷¹
- **Behaviour:** Speech, language and communication needs are recognised as an underlying cause of poor behaviour in the Timpson Review of School Exclusion in England.⁸
- **Interventions:** Children with communication needs may struggle to engage with interventions which are verbally delivered, such as anger management and cognitive behavioural therapy, unless they are adapted.⁹

Having unsupported communication needs also puts young people at increased risk of becoming involved in the criminal justice system, where two thirds of young people have low language skills.¹⁰

Available support

- iii. Given the range of complex needs of children and young people within EOTAS provision, it is clear that support from a range of different professionals will be required. Speech and language therapists (SLTs) working alongside colleagues within education other than at school provision can help to achieve better outcomes for children and young people by providing:
 - **Assessments:** SLTs undertake detailed assessments of pupils' speech, language and communication needs. This helps other staff to understand how to meet the pupils' needs, as well as supporting reintegration back into mainstream provision by advising the school on how to support the pupils' needs.
 - **Training and advice:** SLTs provide staff training to increase understanding of communication needs. They also provide individual advice on how to differentiate teaching or interventions to make them accessible to a young person's unique strengths and needs.

⁷ Conti-Ramsden G., Mok P.L., Pickles A. and Durkin K. (2013). Adolescents with a history of specific language impairment (SLI): strengths and difficulties in social, emotional and behavioral functioning. *Research in developmental difficulties*, 34(11), 416-419.

⁸ Department for Education (2019). Timpson Review of School Exclusion. [Online] Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/807862/Timpson_review.pdf

⁹ Snow, P. (2013). Language competence: A hidden disability in antisocial behaviour. *InPsych*. June 2013. Available at: <https://www.psychology.org.au/publications/inpsych/2013/june/snow/>

¹⁰ Bryan, K., Freer, J. and Furlong, C. (2007), Language and Communication Difficulties in Juvenile Offenders. *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*, 42(5), 505-520.

- **Direct support:** SLTs deliver evidence-based interventions to maximise pupils' communication potential; for example, supporting the understanding and use of the vocabulary words needed for specific subjects.
 - **Communication-supportive environments:** SLTs advise settings on how to develop a communication-friendly environment that maximises opportunities and removes barriers.
- iv. There is currently very little speech and language provision in place to specifically support children and young people within EOTAS provision. Given the high prevalence of communication needs in children and young people with behavioural difficulties, and the consequences of not supporting them, the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists recommend that staff working in EOTAS provision have access to specially commissioned speech and language therapy services. This would enable:
- **Identification** – children and young people should have their communication needs identified when they enter alternative provision to enable staff to differentiate their teaching.
 - **Training** – all staff working in alternative provision should be trained in recognising and responding appropriately to communication needs.
 - **Support** – direct speech and language therapy should be provided to those children and young people in alternative provision who need it, as well as ongoing advice and support to staff to enable them to meet the needs of individual children and young people.
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