

Specific Speech and Language Disorder Class: Information for parents

What is a Specific Speech and Language Disorder Class?

A Specific Speech and Language Disorder Class (more commonly known as a Language Class) is a class in a mainstream primary school, which caters for the educational and speech and language needs of children with Specific Speech and Language Impairment. These classes are run by the Departments of Education and Science with Speech and Language therapy provided by the HSE. There is a maximum of seven children in a language class in any one year. Each class has its own teacher. A HSE Speech and Language Therapist works in the class on a number of days per week. Language Classes follow the regular primary school curriculum with a lesser emphasis on Irish. Children attending a language class may integrate with their peers from mainstream classes for some subjects, during break times and for school activities such as concerts and school tours. The Language Class provides the opportunity for intensive Speech and Language Therapy integrated into the child's school day. The curriculum can be modified as appropriate to each child's unique needs.

What is Specific Speech and Language Impairment (SSLI)?

"Specific Speech and Language impairment is a term currently used to describe children whose skill in understanding and /or expressing themselves through speech and language is significantly impaired. These difficulties occur in the context of normal cognitive abilities and are not primarily attributable to social, emotional, behavioural, educational, physical or sensory difficulties"

IASLT 2007

SSLI can be a lifelong condition. Children with SSLI tend not to make significant gains with generalised language support or with limited amounts of speech and language therapy. These children may also experience literacy difficulties i.e. problems with reading, writing and spelling and with other areas of academic attainment.

What are the Department of Education and Science's criteria for entry into a Language class?

The Department of Education and Science criteria for admission to a Language Class are as follows:

- Assessment by a psychologist on a standardised test of intelligence which places nonverbal ability within the average range or above (ie Performance IQ 90 or more)
- Assessment on a standardised test of language which places performance on one or more of the main areas of language at 2 standard deviations or more below the mean.
- The child's difficulties are not attributable to hearing impairment.
- Emotional or behavioural disorders or a physical disability are not considered to be primary causes.

How do children get a place in a Language Class?

The applications for the Language Class are done through the child's own Speech and Language Therapist. All children applying for places are discussed at an annual meeting known as the Language Class Admissions Meeting. This meeting takes place in March or April each year. The relevant reports on each child will have been circulated in advance to the Advisory Admissions Committee members. The committee comprises some/all of the following:

- _ Speech and Language Therapy Manager / Clinical Specialist
- _ Language Class Teacher
- _ School Principal
- _ Psychologist
- _ Language Class Speech and Language Therapist

The Advisory Admissions Committee makes recommendations to the Board of Management of the school on the allocation of available places in the Language Class based on agreed criteria: These are examples of some of the criteria used:

- _ Severity of the SSLI
- _ Age of the child
- _ The degree to which the SSLI impacts on the child academically, socially and emotionally.
- _ Suitability of language class placement for the child at that time.

How long do children stay in a language class?

The typical cycle is 1 – 2 years. Each child's placement in the Language Class is reviewed annually. Some children may attend the Language Class for one year while other children attend for a longer time. Once attending a language class your child's progress will be reassessed near the end of the school year. A recommendation will then be made on whether your child should attend their own mainstream school or continue in the language class for a further year.

Parental Involvement

Parents are encouraged to be involved with setting speech and language goals and implementing speech and language therapy programmes. Your support is important to ensure that your child benefits fully from his / her time in the class.

Once your child is offered a place in the class you are welcome to attend an open afternoon in the class before the placement. You will be expected to attend meetings with the teacher and therapist during the school year.

Who to contact

If you have concerns about your child's speech and language skills, please contact your local primary care team/health centre. Alternatively ask your G.P or public health nurse.

Useful websites: www.IASLT.ie (Irish association of speech and language therapists)

www.IASLTPP.ie (Irish association of speech and language therapists in private practice)