Lessons from the Better Communication Research Programme

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Better Communication Research Programme

The team

Core Team

Prof Geoff Lindsay[1], Prof Julie Dockrell[2],
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with

Prof Anna Vignoles[2], Prof Jenni Beecham[5],
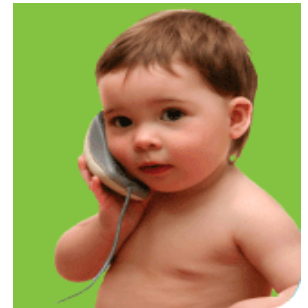Prof Steve Strand[1], Prof Tony Charman[2]

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Summary

1. Overview of BCRP
2. Understanding SLCN – needs and provision: Challenges
   1. Overlap LI and ASD
   2. SLCN and BESD
   3. Prevalence by age
   4. Trajectories and 'switchers' from 'SLCN'
3. Parents' perspectives
4. Communication Classrooms Observational Tool
5. What Works? – intervention database
6. Implications – policy and practice

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1. Overview of the BCRP

- Policy origins
- The research programme

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Policy origins

- Bercow Review (2008) recommendations:
  - Communication is crucial
  - Early identification and intervention is essential
  - A continuum of services designed around the family is needed
  - Joint working is critical
  - The current system is characterised by high variability and a lack of equity

- All were accepted
  - Better Communication Action Plan, including a research programme: BCRP (also Communication Council, Communication Champion etc)

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BCRP: main issues investigated

- Trajectories of children with SLCN over time, in differing contexts.

- Support and interventions being offered currently by schools and by speech and language therapists.

- Evidence base for current practice including indicative costs.

- Perspectives of parents and children regarding the services they use and the outcomes they value.

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Methodology

- Multi-faceted combined methods *programme* comprising 10 main projects, *including*:

- Prospective study over 3 school years

- Systematic review of effectiveness of interventions and cost effectiveness

- Cohort study – children that stammer

- Analysis of national data sets (e.g. School Census)

- Development of *Communication Supporting Classrooms observation tool*
  - Interviews (parents, SLTs, EPs, children); focus groups and workshops
  - Surveys (SLTs, EPs, SENCOs)
  - Classroom observations

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The evidence base- participants

- >6400 children
- >560 parents
- >600 SLTs
- >750 teachers/SENCOs
- c100 schools

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Outputs

- 10 technical reports:
  - full details of the research

- 4 thematic reports:
  - Integrating findings on major themes from across BCRP

- Overall report:
  - Overall recommendations, summary of findings
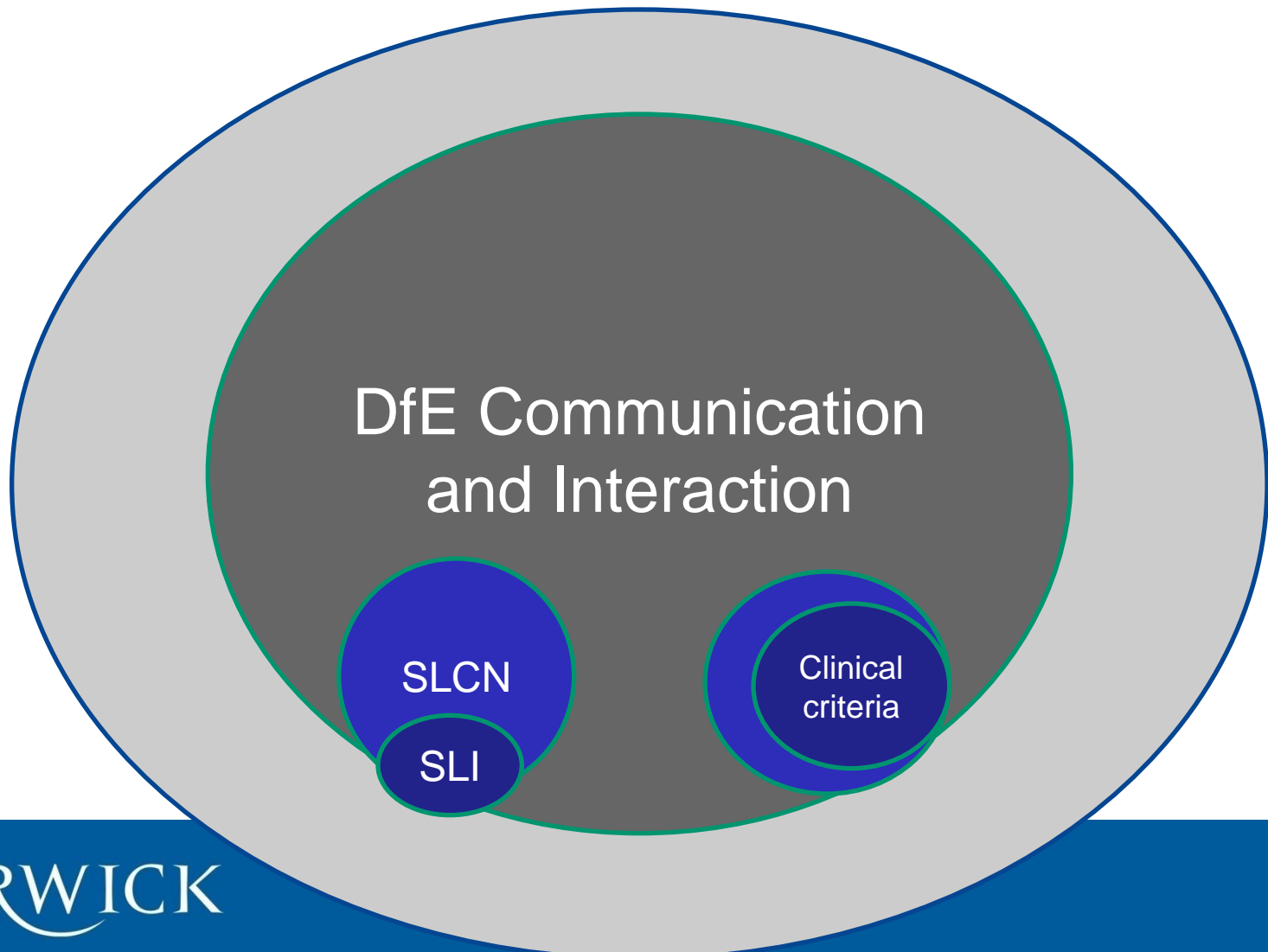

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2. Understanding speech, language and communication needs:

– **Needs versus diagnosis**

– **Provision**

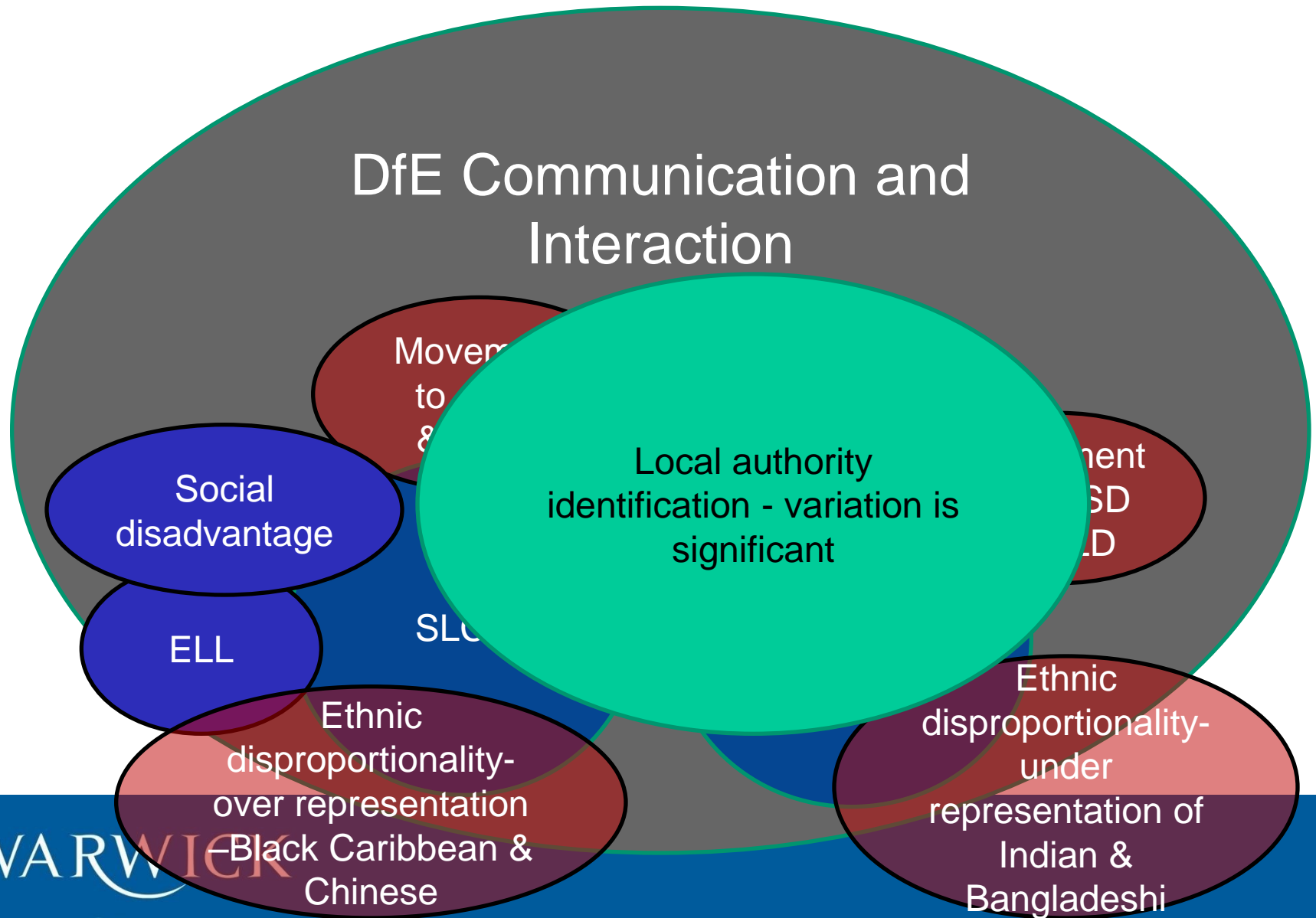- **National data sets**
- **BCRP prospective study**

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Understanding SLCN

DfE Communication and Interaction

SLCN

SLI

Clinical criteria

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i) Analysis of National data sets

DfE Communication and Interaction

Movem...
to
&

...ment
...SD
...LD

Social disadvantage

Local authority identification - variation is significant

ELL

SLC...

Ethnic disproportionality-over representation –Black Caribbean & Chinese

Ethnic disproportionality-under representation of Indian & Bangladeshi

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ii) Prospective study N = 162 over 3 years

- Children with language impairment (LI) or autism spectrum disorder (ASD)

- Profiles of pupils' needs in mainstream classrooms

- How schools addressed the pupils' needs

    - Is support related to

        » language difficulties?

        » and/or social behaviour

        » And/or other aspects of cognition/attainments. language memory, literacy, autism features, quality of life, behaviour and school attainment

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LI and ASD: similarities/ differences?

- Depressed language and communication skills in both LI and ASD cohorts compared with nonverbal ability
  - but for **ASD** *structura*l language ability (grammar and morphology) was higher than **LI**
  - substantial variation within cohorts
    - but more varied in ASD
  - ASD **greater** *social and communication impairment*

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Overlap of language and social interaction
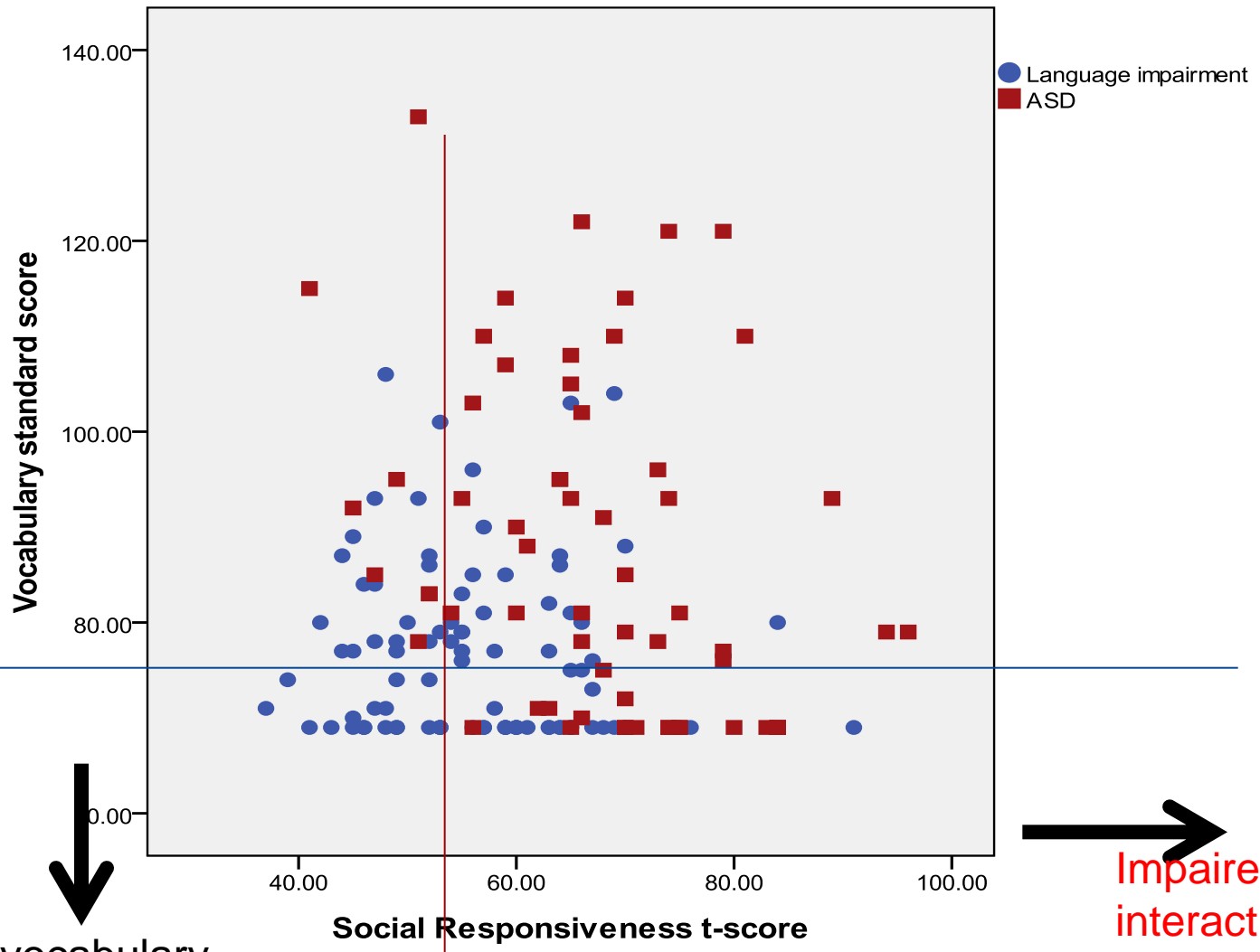
SLCN and BESD

- Higher prevalence of BESD overall among children with SLCN
  - Mainstream and clinic samples
- *But level varies with type of BESD*
  - Main issue is peer problems, emotional symptoms
    - Higher in ASD
  - Conduct problems are less concern
  - Children with ASD more affected
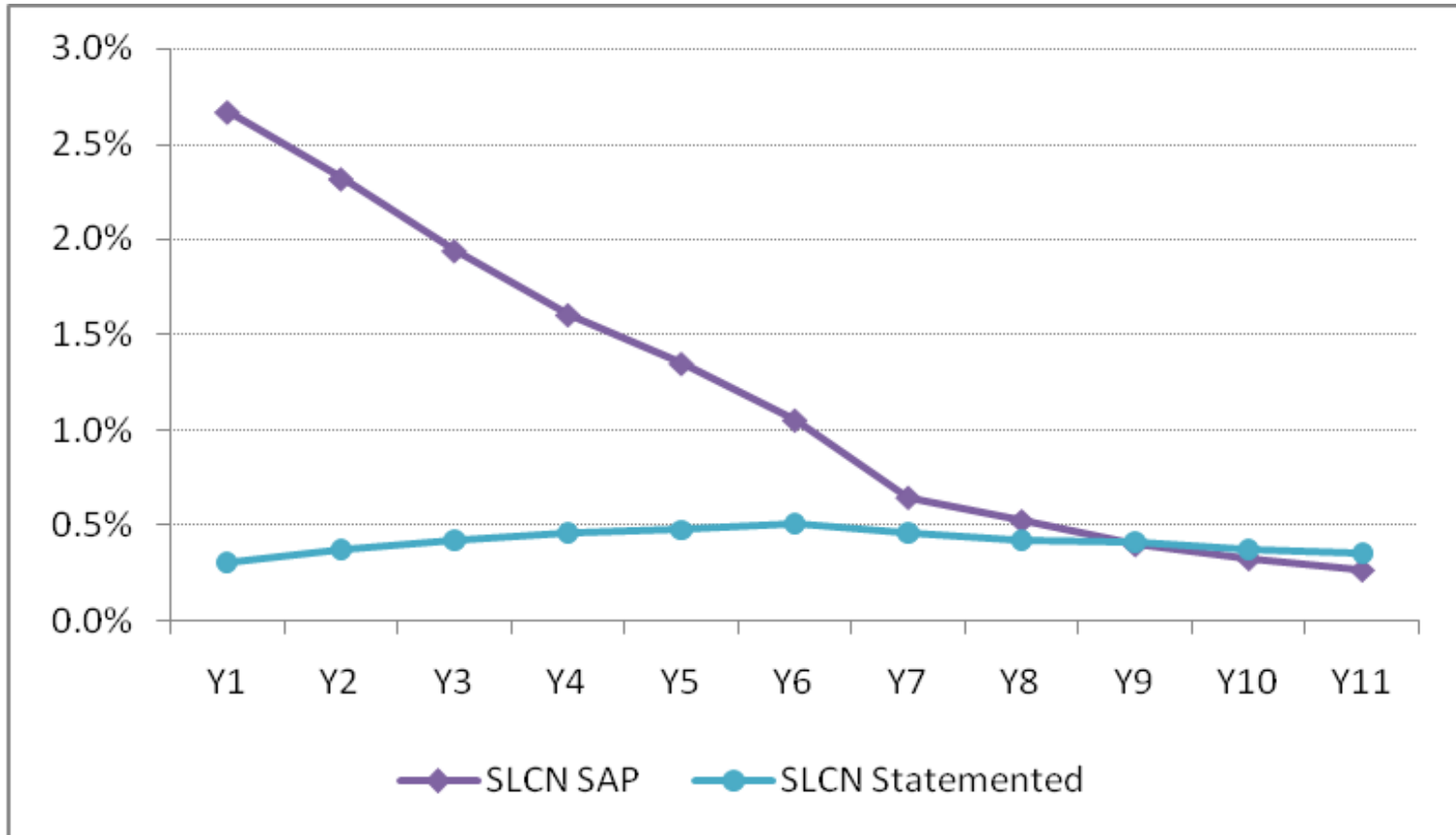- Parents agree
- Not related to level of language ability
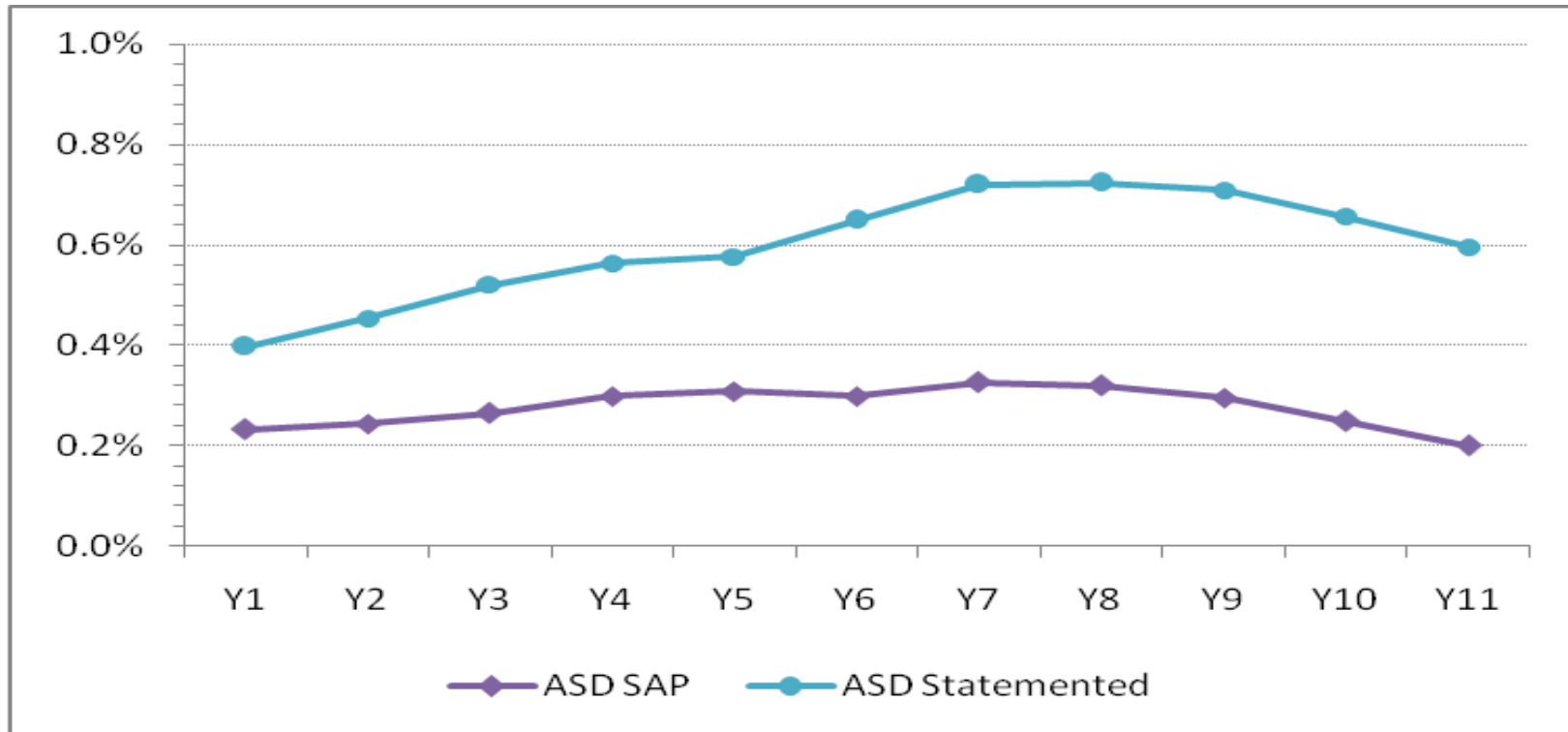
Varied profile by type of BESD
Source: Prospective study

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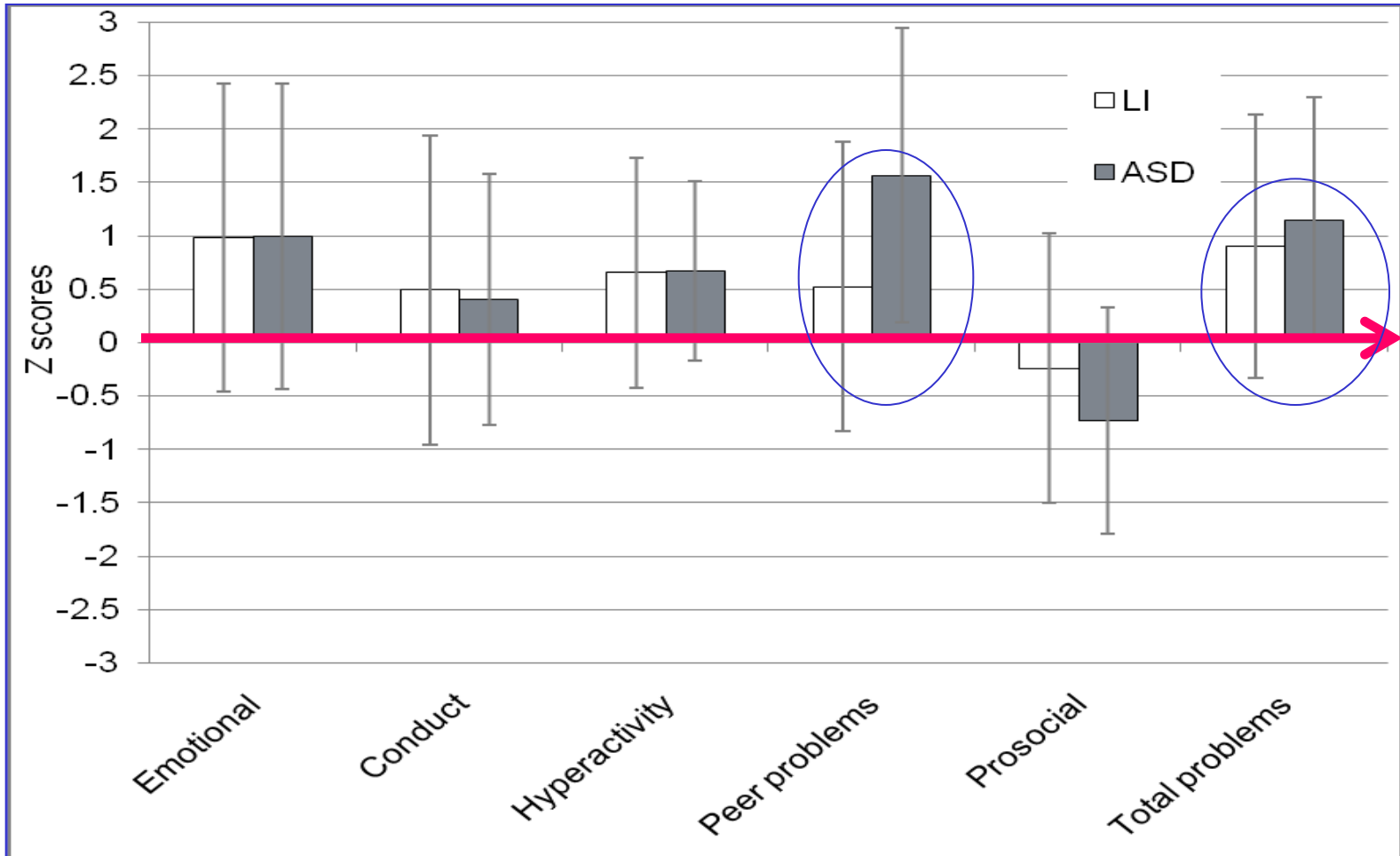
Prevalence of SLCN by age

Statemented and School Action Plus

Prevalence of ASD by age
Statemented and School Action Plus

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Trajectories of SLCN and ASD – 'switchers'

- National data, 6.4 million pupils
- Children with SEN
  - school action plus (SAP)
    - Additional help from professionals outside the school
  - Statement
    - Provision determined by local authority after a statutory assessment
    - Legal process

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Trajectories of SLCN and ASD

- Switchers: children whose category of SEN is reclassified

- Are pupils with SLCN recategorised as BESD at secondary school?

- Only 18% pupils with SLCN at School Action Plus remain in SAP:

  – 24% move to non-SEN

  – 35% to School Action

  – 17% to another SEN category at SAP

So *59% have a positive movement*

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Destinations of 'switchers' from SLCN between Year 6 and Year 9

School Action Plus

Year 6　　　　　　　　　　　　**Year 9**

SLCN
- → MLD 14%
- → SpLD 9%
- → BESD 7%

Statement

Year 6　　　　　　　　　　　　**Year 9**

SLCN
- → MLD 42%
- → ASD 16%
- → SpLD 15%
- → BESD 10%

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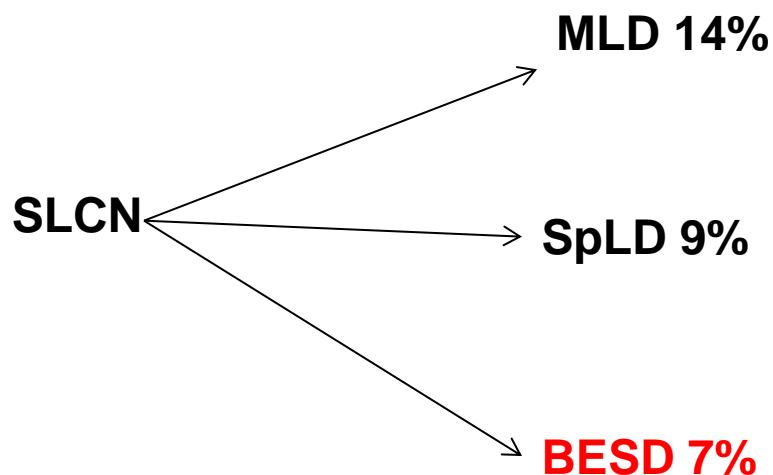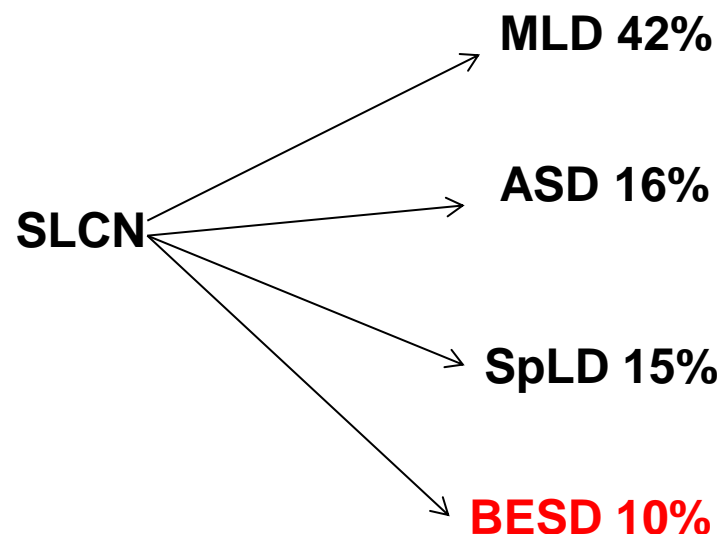
- **Provision in classrooms for children with LI or ASD**

- *Source: Prospective study*

What we observed in classrooms

- Pupils observed to be engaged with the lessons
- Task differentiation and off task behaviour varied within and between cohorts.
- ***Differences in the pupils' scores on assessments did not account for this variation***
- Little evidence of disruptive behaviour or pupils being engaged in irrelevant tasks
- However, pupils with ASD were significantly more likely to be working with a LSA or to be working outside the classroom

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Support and pedagogical approaches

Support

- High levels of support from learning support assistants (LSAs)

- **ASD = 3X LSA time than LI**

- SLT for a significant minority of pupils
  - **reduced for pupils in secondary schools**

- More SLTs with ASD than LI

- **Very little contact with EP or other services.**

Teaching & Learning

- Little use of specialist programmes

- Teachers reported on 12 different strategies

- **Few differences between LI and ASD cohorts**

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3. Parents study: perspectives

- Separate study of parents of children with a wide range of SLCN

- Prospective study: interviews with 129 parents (>80% of sample) of children with LI or ASD

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i) Parents of children with range of SLCN

Key issues

- Social acceptance and emotional well-being

- Target setting

- Early Identification

- Pathways to independence and inclusion
  - Data needed on outcomes of concern to parents in both research and practice
  - Explicit discussion of targeted outcomes of any intervention

ii) Prospective study: Parents' views: *getting on with other children* (% LI and ASD)
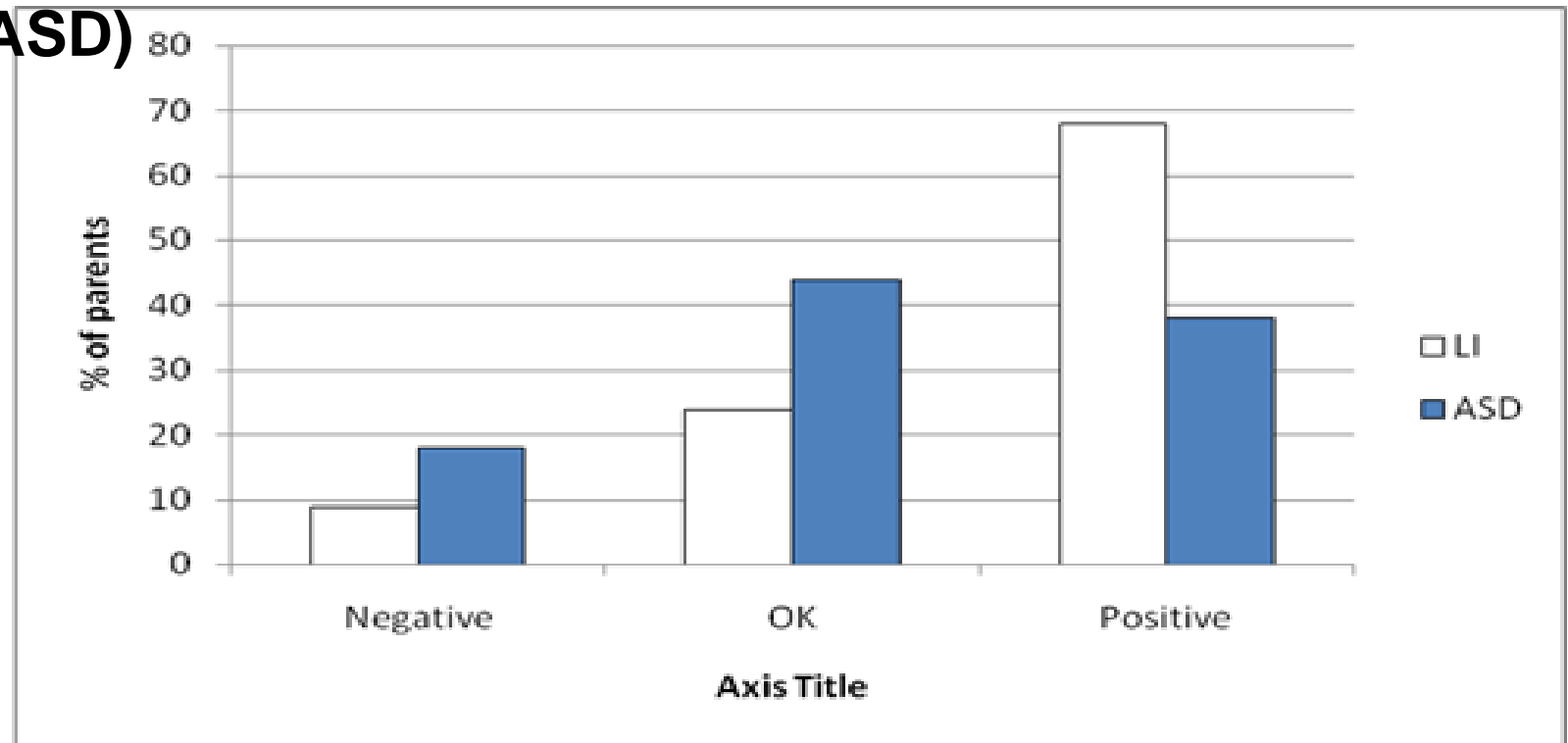
Note: Positive = very good or good, Negative = not very good or not good at all

Source: Prospective study

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School meeting the child's SEN (LI and ASD)
Source: Prospective study

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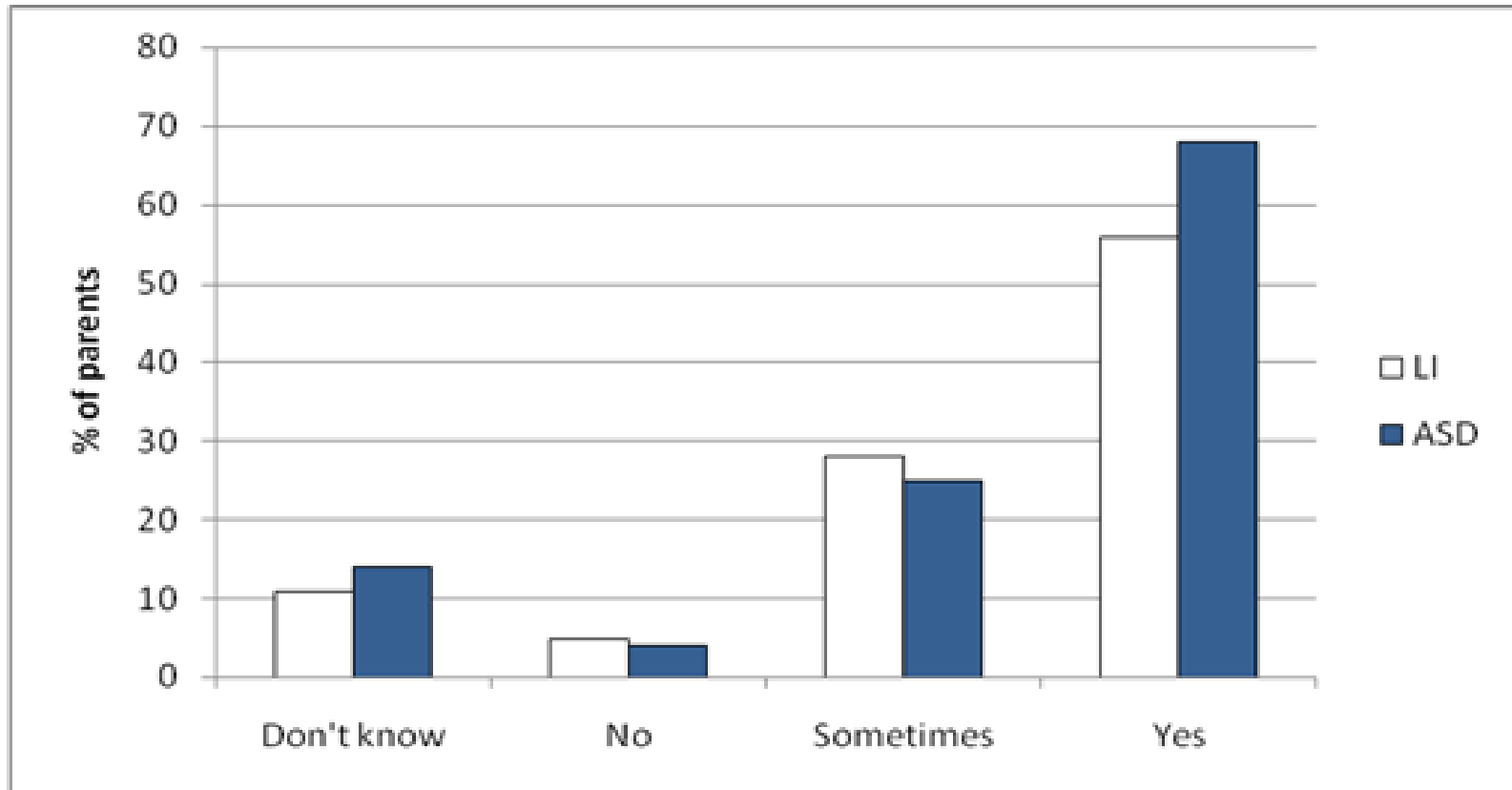
School meeting the SEN - by type provision

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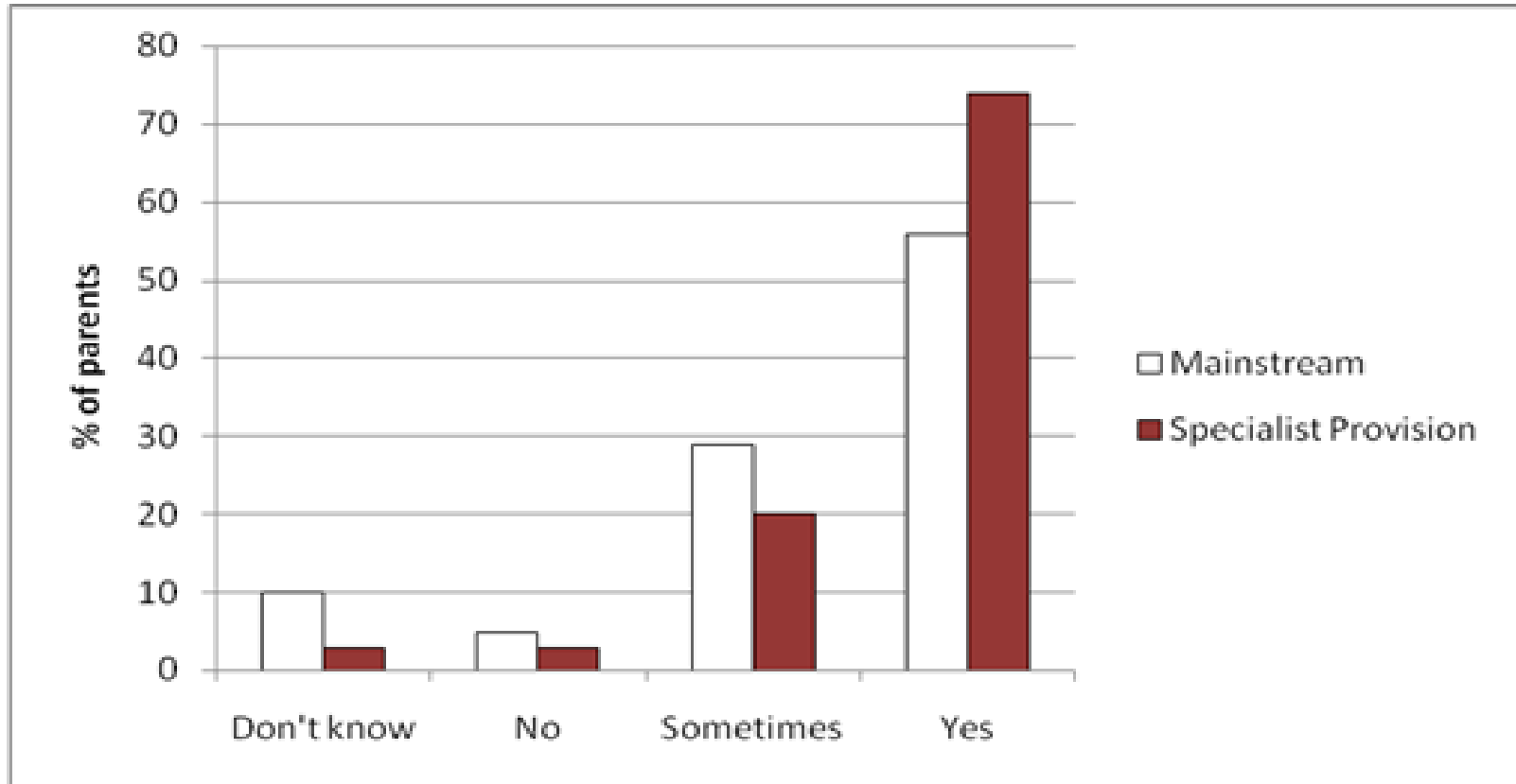
Meeting needs – implications for provision

- Needs of:
  - Policy makers, commissioners, practitioners
- Conceptual
  - E.g. similarities and differences – overlap
- Practical
  - Tools
- Parents
  - Information

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4. Communication Supporting Classrooms observation tool

- Development of a tool to assist teachers
  - Review of literature for what supports communication in classrooms
  - Development and validation of a tool

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Objectives

- Examine evidence base of elements underpinning communication and identify
  - effective processes/strategies/modifications
- Develop these into a Communication Supporting Classrooms (CSC) framework
- Produce an observational tool designed to monitor classroom environments and learning spaces that can be used by school staff
- Develop such a framework into a training schedule

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Research evidence translated to a tool to be used in schools

- Captured
  - **Language learning environment** ...
    - » Elements identified as necessary prerequisites to allow teaching and learning *e.g. Labelling in classrooms, quiet corners*
  - **Language learning opportunities** ...
    - The *what* of learning *e.g. Small group work*
  - **Language learning interactions** ...
    - The *how* of learning *e.g. the ways in which staff talk with children*

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What **were** we seeing?
(101 classrooms)

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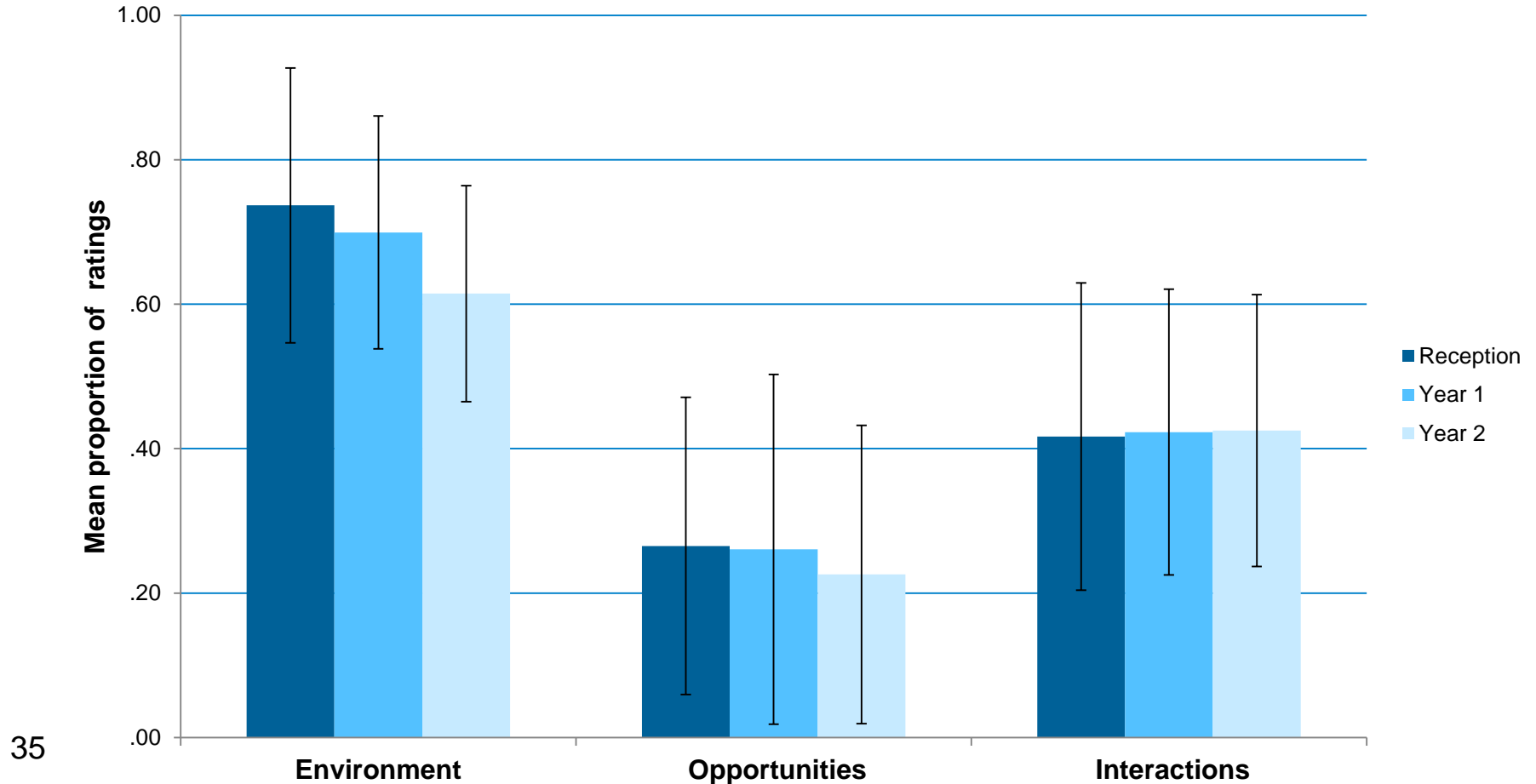
What weren't we seeing?

Language learning interactions

- 20 evidence based interactions

- Could be recorded a maximum of 5 times in the 45 minute observation

Chart — Mean observations in 45 minutes:

Interaction	Mean observations
Provides clear choices	~0.6
Oral scripts for activities	~0.8
Encourages turn taking	~0.9
Supports listening skills	~1.2
Models language	~1.5
Symbols used to reinforce oral language	~2.0
Paces oral language	~2.8
Open questions	~3.0
Confirms oral language contributions	~3.3
Uses of natural gestures	~3.3
Names children	~4.1

Mean observations in 45 minutes

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5. What works?

- Development of a 'best evidence' of the effectiveness of interventions – all SLCN

- A What Works for SLCN? database

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5. Best evidence: effectiveness of interventions

- From the published evidence
- From the BCRP:-
  - Best evidence SLT survey (536 respondents)
    - We explored use of *published programmes, intervention activities,* and p*rinciples/ approaches*.
  - Cost effectiveness activity
  - Development of the *"What Works for SLCN"* resource

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Some key messages – best evidence

- We identified 58 interventions either currently in use or published in the research literature
- Criteria were:
  - Strong evidence: 1+ systematic reviews
  - Moderate: 1+ RCT or quasi-experimental studies
  - Indicative: good face validity but limited research, e.g. case studies or 'before and after' studies.
- Of those that we have identified
  - 5% had strong level of evidence
  - 56% had moderate evidence
  - 39% had indicative evidence

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Some key messages – best evidence

- Five were Universal interventions, 13 were targeted and 16 Specialist

- Sound emerging evidence base with relative strengths in some areas;

- Too few large scale intervention studies to draw firm conclusions about how services should be delivered

  – but plenty of positive evidence about individual techniques;

- Not yet sufficient evidence to suggest that any one of the interventions could readily be scaled up and rolled out

  – but there are many areas where larger effectiveness studies would be warranted.

Later developments

- Now published online by The Communication Trust

- Review group which reviews new interventions and adds to the What works for SLCN? Online resource

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6. BCRP main recommendations

- Six main recommendations in the overall report plus others in the thematic and technical reports address importance of:
  - evidence based practice and commissioning
  - continuum of support
  - provision based on assessment of needs rather than diagnostic category
  - measuring outcomes that reflect parents' preferences
  - effective 'fit for purpose' initial and post qualification training
  - research agenda to support these

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Impact on policy and practice

- *Policy*
  - Children and Families Act 2014
  - Local commissioning of services
- *Practice*
  - 3 levels of intervention
  - Needs v diagnostic approaches
  - Training e.g. Autism Education Trust

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Three levels of intervention

- Support for developing children's speech, language and communication should be conceptualised at three levels.
  - Universal provision for all children
  - Targeted provision for children requiring additional support within mainstream settings, guided by specialists (e.g. speech and language therapists: SLTs)
  - Specialist support within mainstream or special settings with a high level of direct intervention or frequent and sustained consultation by specialists with nonspecialist staff (e.g. teachers, teaching assistants).

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Universal, Targeted and Specialist support

Children with severe, complex and long term SLCN requiring Specialist support in addition to Targeted and Universal provision
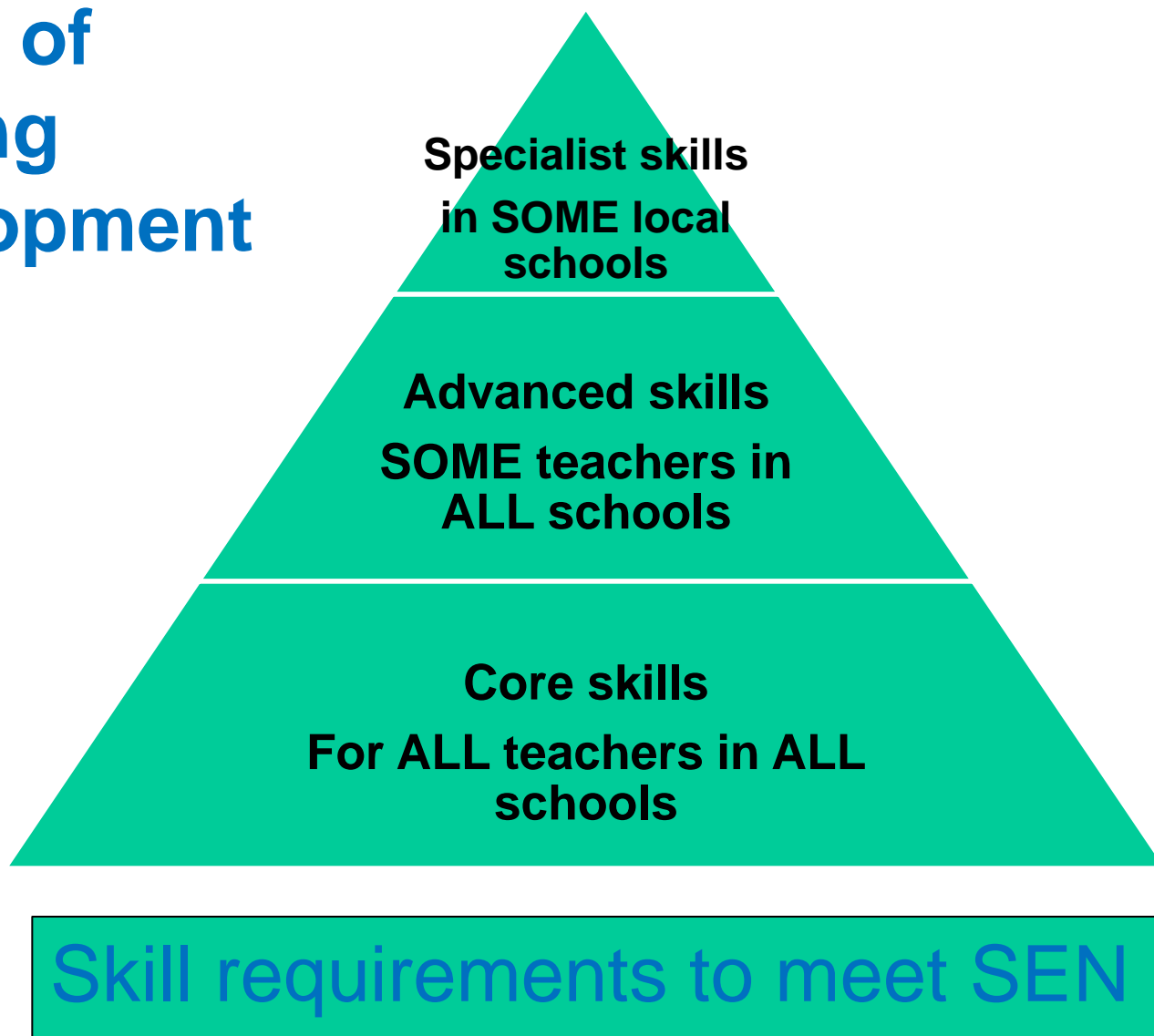
Specialist

All children benefiting from good language environments as part of early development

Children with significant primary SLCN requiring Targeted and / or Specialist support in addition to Universal provision

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Children and Families Bill

- Early identification of needs
- High expectations/aspirations
- Outcomes focus
- Parents', CYP's views 'central' choice and control for CYP and parents
- Education, health social care partners collaborate
- Skills, knowledge and attitude of those working with CYP central to achieving excellent outcomes

- **Local offer**
- **Training**

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Model of training development

Specialist skills
in SOME local schools

Advanced skills
SOME teachers in ALL schools

Core skills
For ALL teachers in ALL schools

Skill requirements to meet SEN

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e.g. Autism Education Trust (2011-13)

Evaluated by CEDAR

- Level 1: >10,000 trained
- Level 2: >1100 trained
- Level 3: > 250 trained
- ***Very positive outcomes***
- Extension 2013-15
  – Pre-school and post-16 year olds

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Conclusions

- BCRP largest study of children with SLCN

- Evidence, practical tools and guidance for commissioners, practitioners and policy makers

- Has had direct impact on policy and practice.

- Series of research papers

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7. Dissemination

- For all 19 reports from the BCRP:

http://www.education.gov.uk/researchandstatistics/research/better

- See also BCRP website CEDAR, University of Warwick

http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/go/bettercommunication

- For the web-based tools:

htpp://www.thecommunicationtrust

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- Law, J., Roulstone, S. & Lindsay, G. (2015). Integrating external evidence of intervention effectiveness with both practice and parent perspective: development of 'What Works' for speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). *Developmental Medicine and Child Neurology, 57, 223-228.* DOI: 10.1111/dmcn.12630.

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- Law, J., Zeng, B., Lindsay, G., & Beecham, J. (2012). The cost-effectiveness of interventions for children with Speech Language and Communication Needs (SLCN): A review using the Drummond and Jefferson (1996) "Referee's Checklist". *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders. 47(1),*1-10.

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Thanks for listening!