**Introduction**

Speech refers to the way we produce the sounds to communicate in our home language. Most children follow a similar pattern in learning sounds. The table below shows the age and order at which children usually acquire English speech sounds:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE IN YEARS</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>h</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>w</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>k</td>
<td>g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>g</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>l</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>s</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>sk</td>
<td>gl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>pl</td>
<td>ch</td>
<td>sh</td>
<td>z</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>br</td>
<td>tr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dr</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>th</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some children have difficulty in learning and using sounds in words, the development of their speech sound skills maybe delayed or they may not be following the general pattern of development.
Strategies to support the development of speech sound skills

- **Give a correct model** – Hearing how a word is said correctly can support a child’s pronunciation of that word. Try modelling back what the child has said so they can hear how certain sounds are pronounced e.g. If a child says “where’s my dair?” when they mean to say ‘chair’, you can respond by modelling back “your chair is by the table”. Slightly emphasis the correct sound.

- **Try not to draw attention to their mispronunciations** – If the child mispronounces a word, do not ask them to repeat it. They may find this embarrassing, especially if this is in front of other students.

- **Encourage conversation** – Show you are listening and respond to what the pupil is saying rather than how clearly they are talking.

- **Don't pretend to understand** – Be honest if you do not understand what a child says. Reassure them that this is ok and you want to hear what they want to say.

- **Praise** – when speech is clear, when new words are attempted, when longer sentences are tried or taught strategies are remembered.

Supporting children to produce sounds in speech

Children in your school may have already spent time working on the sounds they find difficult to say. When supporting a child to say a sound they find hard, there are stages to work through before the child will be able to say this sound in their every day speech. It is important that you work through each of the following stages in the order suggested. Make sure the child can say the sound on its own (e.g. “f”) before asking them to blend it with another sound (e.g. “for”) or use it in words (e.g. “fork”). Please see the following diagram which shows the stages to work through (from 1 to 7).
Once the child is able to pronounce a sound correctly in longer sentences (Stage 7 in our diagram) they are ready to try and use this sound in everyday conversation. Children can need support to remember to use this sound when they are talking, they may not remember the new sound all the time.

Activity ideas to support the generalisation of a sound into conversation:

- Posters – make sound pictures/collages for your sound, practicing saying your new sound in words whilst describing what you have made
- Snap/pairs – play card games that use pictures including the target sound during the game encourage comments and model use of the sound in a sentence.
- Make sound poems/silly rhymes using the target sounds:
  
  “Ten tiny tadpoles tried to trampoline!”

  “Sidney the snake slipped along the sand to sing with the spider!”

- Practise the sound when reading or retelling a story
- Have “sound time” — for 5-10 minutes in the day remind your child about their ‘special sound’ ask them to tell you a story or about their day but thinking really carefully about their sound. (you can do this 2-3 times every day).

When the 5 minutes have passed stop prompting your child. It is really important that your child does not feel “nagged” or “told of” about their sounds as this can make them reluctant to talk and takes the fun out of talking.
During these 5 minutes you can prompt them if they make an error. It is really important this is done sensitively! Use phrases like “ooh, I think I saw your tongue sneak out for that /s/ sound!” or “do you mean dun or Sun?” or “do you mean tat or cat?”

**Strategies to support generalisation into conversation**

If the child makes a mistake while chatting try asking:

- “Did that sound right?”
- “Did you forget something?”
- “Can you make it right?”

The idea is to encourage the pupil to listen to their own speech and correct it rather than rely on others to help. If the child can’t correct it, model the word so they hear a good example and gently encourage correction.

**Resources**

- Speechlink
- Jumbo Articulation Drill book and CD rom
- Black Sheep Press