



EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE PROGRESSION OF SKILLS

Communication and Language

The development of children's spoken language underpins all seven areas of learning and development. Children's back-and-forth interactions from an early age form the foundations for language and cognitive development. The number and quality of the conversations they have with adults and peers throughout the day in a language-rich environment is crucial.

By:

- Commenting on what children are interested in or doing, and echoing back what they say with new vocabulary added, practitioners will build children's language effectively.
- Reading frequently to children, and engaging them actively in stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems, and then providing them with extensive opportunities to use and embed new words in a range of contexts, will give children the opportunity to thrive.
- Through conversation, story-telling and role play, where children share their ideas with support and modelling from their teacher, and sensitive questioning that invites them to elaborate, children become comfortable using a rich range of vocabulary and language structures.



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Children's Speech, Language and Communication Development from Birth to Five Years

Source Mary Sheridan and Development Matters 2021

Age	Key Developmental Milestones (Mary Sheridan)	Development Matters Observation Checkpoints
The new born baby	Within a few days of birth, infants establish interaction with their carers through eye contact, spontaneous or imitative facial gestures and modulation of their sleep-wakefulness state. They show some recognition of their mother's smell and voice by becoming more relaxed, settled and happy. Patterns of interaction and subtle indications of individuality shown by babies from birth onwards strengthen the emotional ties between infants and their carers.	
Age 1 month	Stops whimpering and usually turns towards sound of nearby soothing human voice or loud and prolonged noise e.g. vacuum cleaner, but not when screaming or feeding. Utters little guttural noises and vowel like vocalisations when content. Babies have a preference for social stimuli and will move arms and legs, and make active facial and pre-speech lip and tongue movements responsively to parent's or carer's talk from soon after birth. Cries lustily when hungry or uncomfortable.	



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Age	Key Developmental Milestones (Mary Sheridan)	Development Matters Observation Checkpoints
Age 3 months	Cries when uncomfortable and annoyed. Often sucks or licks lips in response to sounds of preparation of feeding. Shows excitement at sound of approaching voices, footsteps, running bathwater, etc. Vocalises delightedly when spoken to or pleased; also when alone. Vocalisations are integrated with smiles, eye contact and hand gestures during turn taking exchanges or 'protoconversations'.	
Age 6 months	Vocalises tunefully to self and others, using sing-song vowel sounds or single and double syllables, e.g. 'a-a', 'muh', 'goo', 'der', 'adah', 'er-leh', 'aroo'. Laughs, chuckles and squeals aloud in play. Screams with annoyance. Shows recognition of carer's facial expressions such as happy or fearful and responds selectively to emotional tones of voice.	Around 6 months, does the baby respond to familiar voices, turn to their own name and 'take turns' in conversations with babbling?



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Age 9 months	Vocalises deliberately as a means of interpersonal communication – in friendliness or annoyance. Shouts to attract attention, listens, the shouts again. Babbles loudly and tunefully in long repetitive strings of syllables. Babble is practised largely for self-amusement, but also within ‘conversations’ with carers. (7-9 months). Responds when name is called (6-10 months). Gaze-switching- looks between objects and people. Understands ‘no!’ and ‘bye-bye’ (6-9 months). Reacts to ‘where’s mummy/daddy?’ by looking around. Imitates playful vocal and other sounds, e.g. smacking lips, cough, ‘brr’.	



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Age	Key Developmental Milestones (Mary Sheridan)	Development Matters Observation Checkpoints
Age 12 months	Babbles loudly and incessantly in conversational cadences (jargon). Vocalisation contains most vowels and many consonants. Shows by behaviour that some words are understood in usual context e.g. car, drink, cat. Understands simple instructions associated with gesture, e.g. 'give it to daddy', 'come to mummy' (8-12 months) Frequently responds to familiar songs by vocalising. Imitates adult playful vocalisations, e.g. 'uh-oh', and may use a few words, although with inconsistent pronunciation (12-15 months) Will follow gaze of an adult. Points to objects and then looks back to the adult for reaction, in order to make a request or to elicit a comment from the adult.	Around 12 months, does the baby 'take turns' by babbling and using single words? Does the baby point to things and use gestures to show things to adults and share interests? Is the baby using speech sounds (babbling) to communicate with adults? Around 12 months: is the baby beginning to use single words like mummy, dada, teddy (teddy)?



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Age	Key Developmental Milestones (Mary Sheridan)	Development Matters Observation Checkpoints
Age 15 months	Uses jargon, with intonation patterns that sound like connected speech. Says a few recognisable words (usually between 2 and 6) spontaneously in the correct context. Appears to understand some new words each week. Will sustain interest for 2 or more minutes in looking at pictures during shared book reading. Understands and obeys simple, familiar instructions, such as 'don't touch', 'come for dinner', 'give me the ball'. Points to familiar persons, animals or toys when requested. Communicates wishes and needs by pointing and vocalising or screaming.	Around 15 months, can the baby say around 10 words (they may not all be clear)?



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Age	Key Developmental Milestones (Mary Sheridan)	Development Matters Observation Checkpoints
Age 18 months	Chatters continually to self during play, with conversational intonation and emotional inflections (mix of jargon and intelligible words) Listens and responds to spoken communications addressed directly to self. Uses between six and twenty recognisable words and understands many more. Echoes prominent or last word in short sentences addressed to self. Growth spurt in spoken vocabulary from 18 months. Demands a desired object by pointing accompanied by loud, urgent vocalisations or single words, checking back to adult that request has been noted. Enjoys nursery rhymes and tries to join in. Attempts to sing. Hands familiar objects to adult when requested (even if more than one option available). Obeys simple instructions, e.g. 'get you shoes', or 'shut the door'. Points to own, carer's or doll's hair, shoes, nose, feet.	Around 18 months, is the toddler listening and responding to a simple instruction like: "Adam, put on your shoes?" Around 18 months, is the toddler using a range of adult like speech patterns (jargon) and at least 20 clear words? Around 18 months, does the toddler understand lots of different single words and some two-word phrases, such as "give me" or "shoes on"?



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Age	Key Developmental Milestones (Mary Sheridan)	Development Matters Observation Checkpoints
Age 24 months	Uses 50 or more recognisable words appropriately and understands many more. Puts 2 or more words together to form simple sentences (18-30 months). Starting to use 'no' and 'not'. Constantly asking names of objects and people. May omit sounds or parts of words. Attends to communications addressed to self, although may need prompt to stop and shift attention. Begins to listen with obvious interest to more general conversation. Refers to self by name or using personal pronoun 'me' and talks to self continually in long monologues during play but may be incomprehensible to others. Echolalia almost constant, with one or more stressed words repeated. Joins in nursery rhymes and actions songs. Indicates hair, hand, feet, nose, eyes, mouth, shoes, etc. in pictures. Names familiar objects and pictures. Carries out simple instructions such as 'go and see what the postman has brought'. Follows a series of two simple but related commands, e.g. 'get your teddy and put it in the bag'. Can select a named object from a display of 3 or 4 objects.	By around 2 years old, is the child showing an interest in what other children are playing and sometimes joins in? Towards their second birthday, can the child use up to 50 words? Is the child beginning to put two or three words together: "more milk"? Is the child frequently asking questions, such as the names of people and objects? Around the age of 2, can the child understand many more words than they can say – between 200–500 words? Around the age of 2, can the child understand simple questions and instructions like: "Where's your hat?" or "What's the boy in the picture doing?"



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The role of the Preschool staff supporting a child working at birth to 24 months	Baseline the child entering the setting by comparing them to these developmental milestones and decide at what age they are working. If they are found to be working within this stage they are a 'significant concern' an Initial Concern Form should be completed and uploaded to CPOMS. Support should be sort from the Early Years Senco. Assessments will need to be completed using specific assessment tools – as directed by the Senco (e.g. WELLCOMM, SDQ) and a Provision Map prepared using targets and strategies identified. If these early interventions are not sufficient after a four to six week period, an Early Help Assessment will be completed and referrals made to specific specialists. Parents/carers will be updated at all stages of the early identification process.
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Age	Key Developmental Milestones (Mary Sheridan)	Development Matters Observation Checkpoints
Age 2.5 years	Uses 200 or more recognisable words (24-36 months), but speech shows numerous immaturities of articulation and sentence structure. Usually intelligible to familiar carers. Knows full name. Talks audibly and intelligibly to self at play, concerning events happening here and now. Continues to imitate phrases (echolalia). Can select pictures of actions, e.g. 'which one is eating?' (24-33 months). Recognises general family name categories e.g. 'baby', 'mother', 'granny', etc. Makes frequent comments on objects and events or interest, directed to caregivers. Continually asking questions beginning 'what?' or 'who?'. Uses pronouns 'I', 'me' and 'you' correctly.	



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Age	Key Developmental Milestones (Mary Sheridan)	Development Matters Observation Checkpoints
Age 2.5 years cont.	Stuttering in eagerness is common. Recites a few nursery rhymes. Enjoys simple familiar stories read from picture books. Provides a running commentary during play – to self or others. Requires physical or verbal prompts in order to switch attention to looking and listening if engrossed in play.	

The role of the Preschool staff supporting a child working at 2.5 years	Baseline the child entering the setting by comparing them to these developmental milestones and decide at what age they are working. If they are found to be working within this stage in nursery and are 3 years old, they are a 'concern' and should be highlighted to Senco. Ascertain their barrier/gap and develop a graduated approach plan to help the child to close the gap between the age they are assessed at and their actual age. Monitor closely. If they are found to be working within this stage when they are 4 years old or entering Reception then they are a 'significant concern' and immediate support should be sort from the Early Years Senco and/or Early Years Lead. Assessments will need to be completed using specific assessment tools – as directed by the Senco (e.g. WELLCOMM, SDQ) and a Provision Map prepared using targets and strategies identified. If these early interventions are not sufficient after a four to six week period, an Early Help Assessment will be completed
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	and referrals made to specific specialists. Parents/carers will be updated at all stages of the early identification process.
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Age	Key Developmental Milestones (Mary Sheridan)	Development Matters Observation Checkpoints
Age 3 years	Speech modulated in loudness and range of pitch. Large vocabulary intelligible even to strangers, but speech still contains many immature sound substitutions and simplified grammatical forms. Gives full name and sex and, sometimes, age. Uses personal pronouns and plurals correctly, and also most prepositions. Still talks to self in long monologues, mostly concerned with the immediate present, particularly during make-believe activities. Carries on simple conversations and is able to describe briefly present activities and past experiences. Speaking in 3 words phrases. Asks many questions beginning 'what?', 'where?' and 'who?' Can identify objects by function, e.g. 'which one do we eat with?'. Understands descriptive concepts such as 'big', 'wet', 'hot', 'the same', etc.	By around 3 years old, can the child shift from one task to another if you get their attention. Using the child's name can help: "Jason, can you stop now? We're tidying up". Towards their third birthday, can the child use around 300 words? These words include descriptive language. They include words for time (for example, 'now' and 'later'), space (for example, 'over there') and function (for example, they can tell you a sponge is for washing). Is the child linking up to 5 words together? Is the child using pronouns ('me', 'him', 'she'), and using plurals and prepositions ('in', 'on', 'under') - these may not always be used correctly to start with. Can the child follow instructions with three key words like: "Can you wash dolly's face?" Around the age of 3, can the child show that they understand action words by pointing to the right picture in a book. For example: "Who's jumping?" Note: watch out for children whose speech is not easily understood by unfamiliar adults. Monitor their progress and consider whether a hearing test might be needed.



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Age 3 years cont.	Listens eagerly to stories and demands favourites over and over again. Knows several nursery rhymes to repeat and sometimes sing. Counts by rote to 10 or more, but little appreciation quantity beyond 2 or 3. Recognises named colours.	Around the age of 3, can the child shift from one task to another if you fully obtain their attention, for example, by using their name?
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The role of the Nursery staff supporting a child working at 3 years	Baseline the child entering the setting by comparing them to these developmental milestones and decide at what age they are working. If they are found to be working within this stage in nursery and are 3 years old, they are a 'on track'. Support children to embed/develop depth and breadth through: Continue to challenge children to identify objects by function. Model and encourage 'what?', 'where?' and 'who?' questions. Re-reading favourite stories and singing favourite rhymes. Support children to make progress by: Commenting on what the children are interested in or doing using complete sentences introducing new words. Modelling correct grammar by echoing back to children what they have said with grammar corrected, e.g. 'I seed a dog last night' practitioner response 'Really? You saw a dog last night? I saw a dog last night as well, it was black...' emphasising the corrected grammar. Read frequently to children and then providing them with extensive opportunities to use and embed new words in a range of contexts. Engage children in conversations that include some 'why?', 'when?' and 'how?' questions. The responses may need to be modelled/scaffolded. E.g. 'How did you make your playdough into a sausage shape?' ... 'I thought I saw you rolling your playdough with your hands, is that how you made it into that sausage shape?' Begin to model the use of some abstract concepts such as 'before', 'after' and 'if'. Engage children in lots of singing – repeating favourite nursery rhymes and songs frequently. When the children are engaged in story-telling, role-play and having general conversations ask questions that invite them to elaborate.
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	Encourage children to recognise named colours and attempt to use colour names for themselves. Use sentences with 2 and then 3 information carrying words, e.g. 'put the <u>cup</u> and the <u>plate</u> on the <u>chair</u>.' Model and encourage the use of word category names e.g. toys, food, vegetables, clothes... Encourage children to begin to link ideas linguistically using 'and' and 'then'. Providing lots of hands on experiences with objects and events that they may not get to experience with their family e.g. time to play with food like spaghetti, a wider variety of foods to taste, hands on experiences with animals, plants, artefacts; hands on experiences such as tractor visits, fire engines etc. Monitor closely. As children progress over the year their progress should enable them to move smoothly onto the 4 years old age band milestones. If at any point this becomes a concern for a child then they must be recorded with a concern for this area and staff must ascertain their barrier/gap and develop a graduated approach plan to help the child to close the gap between the age they are assessed at and their actual age. If they are found to be working within this stage when they are entering Reception then they are a 'concern' and should be highlighted to the Early Years Senco. Ascertain their barrier/gap and develop a graduated approach plan to help the child to close the gap between the age they are assessed at and their actual age. Monitor closely.
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EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE PROGRESSION OF SKILLS

Age	Key Developmental Milestones (Mary Sheridan)	Development Matters Observation Checkpoints
Age 4 years	Speech grammatically correct and completely intelligible. Shows only a few immature sound substitutions, usually of r-l-w-y group, p-th-f-s group or k-t sound group. May simplify consonant clusters, e.g. 'sring' for 'string'. Gives connected account of recent events and experiences. Gives full name, home address and usually age. Continually asking questions 'why?', 'when?', 'how?' and the meanings of words. Understands some abstract concepts, e.g. 'one of', 'before' and 'after', 'if'. Listens to and tells long stories, sometimes confusing fact and fantasy. Counts by rote up to 20 or more, and beginning to count objects by word and touch in one-to-one correspondence up to 4 or 5. Enjoys jokes and verbal incongruities. Knows several nursery rhymes and can repeat or sing correctly. Able to name basic colours reliably.	Around the age of 4, is the child using sentences of four to six words – "I want to play with cars" or "What's that thing called?"? Can the child use sentences joined up with words like 'because', 'or', 'and'? For example: "I like ice cream because it makes my tongue shiver". Is the child using the future and past tense: "I am going to the park" and "I went to the shop"? Can the child answer simple 'why' questions?



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Age 4 years cont.	Able to use language to pretend, e.g. you be the baby...' Able to link some ideas linguistically – initially using 'and' and 'then' before 'because'. Understands sentences of three and the four information carrying words, e.g. 'put the <u>cup</u> and the <u>plate</u> on the <u>chair</u>.' Understands and uses words to represent categories, e.g. toys, food.	
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EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE PROGRESSION OF SKILLS

The role of the Nursery/Reception staff supporting a child working at 4 years	Baseline the child entering the setting by comparing them to these developmental milestones and decide at what age they are working. If they are found to be working within this stage in nursery and are 4 years old or on entry to Reception and are 4 years old and a Spring or Summer born child, they are a 'on track'. Support children to embed/develop depth and breadth through: Continue to encourage the children to tell long stories. Continue to model and encourage 'what?', 'where?', 'how?' and 'who?' questions. Re-reading favourite stories and singing favourite rhymes. Continue to model and encourage the use of abstract concepts such as 'before', 'after' and 'if'. When the children are engaged in story-telling, role-play and having general conversations ask questions that invite them to elaborate. Continue to use sentences with 4 information carrying words, e.g. 'put the <u>cup</u> and the <u>plate</u> on the <u>chair</u>.' Model and encourage the use of word category names e.g. toys, food, vegetables, clothes... Encourage children to begin to link ideas linguistically using 'and', 'then' and 'because'. Support children to make progress by: Commenting on what the children are interested in or doing using complete sentences introducing new words. Model defining concrete nouns by use e.g. I need something to contact the doctor with. I could use the phone or I could use the laptop for a video chat. Model the use of time and sequence concepts such as 'first', 'then' and 'last'.
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	Read frequently to children and then providing them with extensive opportunities to use and embed new words in a range of contexts, provide them with lots of opportunities to act the stories out alone or with friends. Engage children in conversations that include some 'why?', 'when?' 'who?' and 'how?' questions. The responses may need to be modelled/scaffolded. E.g. 'How did you make your playdough into a sausage shape?' ... 'I thought I saw you rolling your playdough with your hands, is that how you made it into that sausage shape?' Begin to use sentences with 5 information carrying words, e.g. 'put your <u>hat</u>, <u>scarf</u>, <u>gloves</u> and <u>bottle</u> in your <u>bag</u>.' Begin to use language to compare objects e.g. 'smaller', 'stronger', 'faster'. Providing lots of hands on experiences with objects and events that they may not get to experience with their family e.g. time to play with food like spaghetti, a wider variety of foods to taste, hands on experiences with animals, plants, artefacts; hands on experiences such as tractor visits, fire engines etc. Monitor closely. As children progress over the year their progress should enable them to move smoothly onto the 5 years old age band milestones. If at any point this becomes a concern for a child then they must be recorded with a concern for this area and staff must ascertain their barrier/gap and develop a graduated approach plan to help the child to close the gap between the age they are assessed at and their actual age. If they are found to be working within this stage when they are entering Reception but are a 4-year-old Autumn born child then they are a 'concern' and should be highlighted to the Early Years Senco. Ascertain their barrier/gap and develop a graduated approach plan to help the child to close the gap between the age they are assessed at and their actual age. Monitor closely.
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Age	Key Developmental Milestones (Mary Sheridan)	Development Matters Observation Checkpoints
Age 5 years	Speech fluent, grammatically conventional and usually phonetically correct except for confusions of s-f-th group. Loves to be read or told stories and acts them out in detail later, alone or with friends. Gives full name, age and usually birthday. Gives home address. Can listen to instructions whilst engaged in activities. Defines concrete nouns by use. Understands time and sequence concepts and uses terms such as 'first', 'then', 'last'. Constantly asks meaning of abstract words and uses them, usually appropriately but with some errors. Delights in reciting or singing rhymes and jingles. Enjoys jokes and riddles. Understands sentences of 5 information carrying words, e.g. put your <u>teddy</u>, <u>book</u>, <u>drink</u> and <u>hat</u> in your <u>bag</u>.'	



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Age 5 years cont.	Able to use language to compare, e.g. 'bigger, heavier, strongest...' Understands the use of abstract linguistic concepts for temporal sequences 'when...then...', 'if...then...'	
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The role of the Reception staff supporting a child working at 5 years

Baseline the child entering the setting by comparing them to these developmental milestones and decide at what age they are working.

If they are found to be working within this stage **on entry to Reception** and are 4 years old and are Autumn, Spring or Summer born child, they are a 'on track'.

Support children to embed/develop depth and breadth through:

Continuing to encourage them to love to be read or told stories and act them out in detail later, alone or with friends.

Continue to gives full name, age and birthday as well as home address.

Continue to listen to instructions whilst engaged in activities.

Continue to defines concrete nouns by use.

Continue to understands time and sequence concepts and uses terms such as 'first', 'then', 'last'.

Constantly encouraging them to ask the meaning of abstract words and to use them. Gently correct errors

Continue encouraging them to delight in reciting or singing rhymes and jingles. Enjoys jokes and riddles.

Continue to use sentences of 5 information carrying words, e.g. put your teddy, book, drink and hat in your bag.'

Continue to model and encourage 'what?', 'where?', 'how?' and 'who?' questions.

Continue to model and encourage the use of abstract concepts such as 'before', 'after' and 'if'.

When the children are engaged in story-telling, role-play and having general conversations ask questions that invite them to elaborate.



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	Model and encourage the use of word category names e.g. toys, food, vegetables, clothes... Encourage children to begin to link ideas linguistically using 'and', 'then' and 'because'. Commenting on what the children are interested in or doing using complete sentences introducing new words. Model defining concrete nouns by use e.g. I need something to contact the doctor with. I could use the phone or I could use the laptop for a video chat. Model and encourage their use of time and sequence concepts such as 'first', 'then' and 'last'. Read frequently to children and then providing them with extensive opportunities to use and embed new words in a range of contexts, provide them with lots of opportunities to act the stories out alone or with friends. Engage children in conversations that include some 'why?', 'when?' 'who?' and 'how?' questions. The responses may need to be modelled/scaffolded. E.g. 'How did you make your playdough into a sausage shape?' ... 'I thought I saw you rolling your playdough with your hands, is that how you made it into that sausage shape?' Secure their use of language to compare objects e.g. 'smaller', 'stronger', 'faster'. Echo back what children say with new vocabulary added. Model and encourage the correct use of past, present and future tenses. Providing lots of hands on experiences with objects and events that they may not get to experience with their family e.g. time to play with food like spaghetti, a wider variety of foods to taste, hands on experiences with animals, plants, artefacts; hands on experiences such as tractor visits, fire engines etc. Monitor closely.
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	As children progress over the year their progress should enable the expected level when assessed against the Early Learning Goals for Communication and Language. If at any point this becomes a concern for a child then they must be recorded as a concern for this area. Staff must ascertain their barrier/gap and develop a graduated approach plan to help the child to close the gap between the age they are assessed at and their actual age. The Early Years Senco must be informed.
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The Early Learning Goals for Communication and Language

ELG: Listening, Attention and Understanding	Children at the expected level of development will: - Listen attentively and respond to what they hear with relevant questions, comments and actions when being read to and during whole class discussions and small group interactions; - Make comments about what they have heard and ask questions to clarify their understanding; - Hold conversation when engaged in back-and-forth exchanges with their teacher and peers.
ELG: Speaking	Children at the expected level of development will: - Participate in small group, class and one-to-one discussions, offering their own ideas, using recently introduced vocabulary; - Offer explanations for why things might happen, making use of recently introduced vocabulary from stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems when appropriate; - Express their ideas and feelings about their experiences using full sentences, including use of past, present and future tenses and making use of conjunctions, with modelling and support from their teacher.