

## Running Head: EXPECTATIONS OF SCHOOL TRANSITION IN DLD

**Title:** Expectations Of The Transition To Secondary School In Children With Developmental Language Disorder And Low Language Ability.

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**Abstract: Background:** A successful transition from primary to secondary school for typically developing (TD) children is associated with academic and psychosocial outcomes. Children with Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) tend to have pervasive needs in both of these domains, yet little is known about their experience of this transition. We have no information concerning the transition for children with low language (LL). **Aims:** 1) To explore the expectations of the transition to primary school for children with DLD, children with Low-Language (LL) proficiency and their TD peers; 2) to examine the predictors of transition concerns for each group. **Sample:** Children aged 10-11 in the final year of primary school with DLD (n = 30), LL (n = 29) or TD (n = 48) were recruited from eight UK primary schools in the summer term. **Methods:** A battery of standardized language and psychosocial assessments, including the School Concerns Questionnaire (SCQ; Rice, Frederickson & Seymour, 2011) were administered. **Results:** The TD group had significantly lower levels of school concern than the DLD and LL groups, but the DLD and LL groups did not significantly differ. Concerns of children with DLD and LL were predicted by scholastic competence whereas concerns of TD children were predicted by social competence, emotion recognition, and expressive suppression. **Conclusions:** Results indicate that provision made by primary and secondary schools to facilitate a successful transition may most usefully target different areas depending on pupils' language level.

**Keywords:** Developmental Language Disorder, Transition, Low Language, School Concerns.

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Abstract

**Background:** A successful transition from primary to secondary school for typically developing (TD) children is associated with academic and psychosocial outcomes. Children with Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) tend to have pervasive needs in both of these domains, yet little is known about their experience of this transition. We have no information concerning the transition for children with low language (LL). **Aims:** 1) To explore the expectations of the transition to primary school for children with DLD, children with Low-Language (LL) proficiency and their TD peers; 2) to examine the predictors of transition concerns for each group. **Sample:** Children aged 10-11 in the final year of primary school with DLD (n = 30), LL (n = 29) or TD (n = 48) were recruited from eight UK primary schools in the summer term. **Methods:** A battery of standardized language and psychosocial assessments, including the School Concerns Questionnaire (SCQ; Rice, Frederickson & Seymour, 2011) were administered. **Results:** The TD group had significantly lower levels of school concern than the DLD and LL groups, but the DLD and LL groups did not significantly differ. Concerns of children with DLD and LL were predicted by scholastic competence whereas concerns of TD children were predicted by social competence, emotion recognition, and expressive suppression. **Conclusions:** Results indicate that provision made by primary and secondary schools to facilitate a successful transition may most usefully target different areas depending on pupils' language level.

## **Expectations of the Transition to Secondary School in Children with Developmental Language Disorder and Low Language Ability**

A successful transition from primary to secondary school results in students being academically and behaviourally involved in their new secondary school and feeling a sense of belonging to school (Riglin, Frederickson, Shelton, & Rice, 2013). This has been associated with optimal academic and psychosocial outcomes at the end of their first year of secondary school (Riglin et al., 2013; Waters, Lester, Wenden & Cross, 2012). This may be an especially challenging time for children with Developmental Language Disorder (DLD)<sup>1</sup>, which affects approximately 7.5% of children (Norbury et al., 2016; Tomblin et al., 1997). DLD is a neurodevelopmental disorder categorised by impairments across language areas (e.g. phonology, semantics and syntax) and modalities (i.e. spoken and written). These impairments can be receptive, expressive or mixed (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Bishop, Snowling, Thompson & Greenhalgh, 2017). We know little about the experience of the transfer from primary to secondary school for children with DLD, and we have no information concerning the transition for children with low language (LL), who have below average language skills but do not qualify for clinical diagnosis. However, for typically developing (TD) children the success of the transition is affected by levels of academic attainment and psychosocial well-being (Evangelou et al., 2008; Riglin, et al., 2013). Children and adolescents with DLD tend to have pervasive needs in both of these domains (Conti-Ramsden, Bishop, Clark, Norbury & Snowling, 2014; Dockrell, Lindsay, Palikara & Cullen, 2007). This study aimed to explore the expectations of (i.e. beliefs about) the

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<sup>1</sup> This was formerly referred to as Specific Language Impairment 'SLI'. Practitioners' concerns regarding a lack of consensus with regards to terminology and criteria creating a barrier to prevention and intervention services for children with language disorder led to a change in definition (Bishop, Snowling, Thompson & Greenhalgh, 2017). DLD is now to be used when language disorder is not associated with a known aetiology. In discussion of previous literature DLD is referred to throughout this article, regardless of whether studies used previous diagnostic labels.

transition to secondary school for children with DLD, children with LL proficiency and their TD peers; including examining the predictors of these concerns between groups. The information garnered can feed into the development of evidence-based targeted provision to improve the experience of the transition.

### **The Transition from Primary to Secondary School in Typical Development**

The transition from primary to secondary school typically occurs at 11 years of age in the UK. This coincides with the onset of adolescence and its myriad biological changes. The move usually involves many changes such as a larger student body and multiple different teachers. It can mean a greater degree of independence and responsibility and can be stressful for some children (McGee, Ward, Gibbons & Harlow, 2003; Riglin et al., 2013). While, for a majority, this is a time of widening horizons and growing independence, it can be a time when students' confidence as learners is reduced and consequently, primary school level progress may not be maintained after the move to secondary level (Evangelou et al., 2008).

Evangelou et al. (2008) found that 84% of a sample of 1190 children transitioning to secondary school in the UK felt prepared for moving to secondary school, but 16% did not. Importantly, 40% reported that staying with friends and/or siblings was their top priority when thinking about their choice of secondary school. Correspondingly, loss of old friends is one of the greatest concerns of TD children surrounding the school transition (Keay, Lang & Frederickson, 2015), with other factors including personal adaptability, new teachers and rules, coping with work and moving around the new environment (Gray, 2009).

Such concerns can have a direct impact on the level of success of the transition; indeed, looking forward to going to secondary school is one of the most influential factors promoting a positive transition among children. School support with the formation and

continuation of friendships networks not only helps children cope with this transfer (McGee et al., 2003; Ng-Knight et al., 2018) but is also linked to higher self-esteem, greater confidence and greater academic progress in secondary school (Evangelou et al., 2008). Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) may need extra support in these areas (Topping, 2011).

### **Transition from Primary to Secondary School for Children with Developmental Language Disorder**

While concerns in relation to the transition from primary to secondary school are felt by TD children as well as those with SEND (Hughes, Banks, & Terras, 2013; Gray, 2009, Zeedyk et al., 2003); these concerns are likely to differ by degree. While most primary school pupils view the impending transition positively, more vulnerable pupils (i.e. those with SEND, ethnic minorities, lower socio-economic backgrounds and lower academic achievers) likely need intervention prior to transition (Makin, Hill & Pellicano, 2017). These difficulties are may make the transition particularly vulnerable for the 7.5% of children affected by DLD (Norbury et al., 2016), and for children with LL. DLD and LL are notoriously under-identified in educational contexts (Leonard, 2014). To date limited studies have addressed effects of the transition upon children with DLD (Dockrell & Lindsay, 2007) and none have included a quantitative measure exploring these children's concerns in the lead up to the transition. No studies have investigated the experience or effects of the transition on children with LL.

However, Dockrell and Lindsay (2007) examined the transition of children with specific speech and language difficulties (SSLD;  $n = 69$ ) and their peers with SEND (with general learning difficulties but not speech and language needs;  $n = 32$ ) and their TD peers ( $n = 42$ ). They included a quantitative measure examining the views of parents' and teachers'

concerning the children's needs and the provision in place for them. The only significant group difference was the parents' judgments of their children's concerns relative to their own concerns; parents of children with SSLD and SEND children reported higher levels of concern for themselves than for their child (i.e. they reported being more worried than their children). It is not clear whether the children's expectations at this time would have more accurately predicted their experience; this highlights the importance of a quantitative measure exploring the child's own expectations of this key transition, rather than solely relying on parent and teacher quantitative measures; particularly in areas such as peer relationships.

### **Peer Relationships and Emotional Skill During the Transition**

The importance of peer relations over the transition period has been established (Evangelou et al., 2008; Keay et al., 2015; Ng-Knight et al., 2018). Language and communicative skills are essential for initiating and maintaining relationships (sociability) and for peer interactions (Brinton & Fujiki, 2002). Correspondingly, children with DLD have increased risk of social impairment and peer problems (Durkin & Conti-Ramsden, 2007; Conti-Ramsden, Mok, Pickles & Durkin, 2013). Children with LL are also at risk of experiencing a poor trajectory of peer relations (Mok, Pickles, Durkin & Conti-Ramsden, 2014). However, whilst language competence predicts adolescents' friendship quality and social behaviour (Durkin & Conti-Ramsden, 2007), other comorbidities associated with DLD may also impact on peer relationships, and the transition to secondary school. We know that children with DLD and LL are more likely than their TD peers to experience emotional problems (Conti-Ramsden et al. 2013; Mok et al., 2014; Norbury et al., 2016; Yew & O'Kearney, 2013). Children with DLD and LL often experience deficiencies relative to their TD peers beyond language ability; more specifically, children with DLD receive significantly lower teacher ratings of emotion regulation (Fujiki, Brinton & Clarke, 2002) and are

significantly less accurate in the identification of emotion in others (Spackman, Fujiki & Brinton, 2006) than their TD peers. The transition from primary to secondary school has been shown to be more difficult for children with emotional difficulties (Riglin, Petrides, Frederickson & Rice, 2014).

### **Academic Concerns Regarding the Transition**

In addition to the increase in social/emotional pressure during the transition to secondary school, there is also more academic pressure for students (Nuske et al., 2018). Gray (2009) found ‘coping with work’ to be a recurring theme of concern for TD children prior to the transition. This is likely to be exacerbated in children with DLD as they have lower academic performance (Durkin, Mok & Conti-Ramsden, 2015; Dockrell et al., 2007) and scholastic competence (Lindsay & Dockrell, 2012; Lindsay, Dockrell & Palikara, 2010; Jerome, Fujiki, Brinton & James, 2002) than their TD peers. To date no research has explored this during this critical period. Children with LL are less present in the literature than children with DLD, but extant literature indicates significantly greater academic difficulties than TD peers (Myers & Botting, 2008). They may not receive the full benefit of the support that a child with a diagnosis would be entitled to, despite being at a similar risk of negative outcomes related to poor academic achievement (Conti-Ramsden, Durkin, Toseeb, Botting & Pickles, 2017). More knowledge needs to be garnered relating to the scholastic competence of children with LL from educational practitioners, parents, or directly from children.

### **The Importance of the Child’s Voice**

While apprehension concerning the primary to secondary school transition is commonplace (Riglin et al., 2013; Evangelou et al., 2008; Zeedyk et al, 2003), it is also the case that many students do look forward to the move. It is the minority who worry about the

transition to an extent to which it may hinder their success that need to be identified. While it is important to collect parents' and teachers' views, adult perceptions of what children and young people think may differ from the child's own perception (Sweeting, 2001). The importance of the child's voice has been highlighted in international (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989; UNICEF, 1999) and UK (Children Act, 1989; HMSO, 1989) policy. These policies emphasise the role that children are entitled to play in informing decisions about their own future. This is further substantiated by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice (Department for Education and Skills, 2015) in England.

Despite this, the voice of children with DLD, especially during transition from primary to secondary education, remains under-investigated. This is likely partly due to the inevitable difficulties associated with eliciting valid responses. Appropriate methodology must be selected to ensure that language not become a barrier, and importantly rapport must be built between researcher and child to encourage the child and counter some of the hesitancy that children with DLD can have. However, this can be achieved (Owen, Hayett & Roulstone, 2004). Dockrell and Lindsay (2007) successfully conducted interviews with primary school aged children with SSLD. They expressed their perspectives on how their language difficulties impact their academic progress, peer relationships, and involvement in decision-making. Qualitative measures have also been used to capture the voice of adolescents at a different transitional time: the first year of post-16 education. Palikara, Lindsay and Dockrell (2009) found that the large majority of their sample were able to provide a meaningful account of their personal and educational journeys.

### **Current Study**



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There is a dearth of information on the experience of the transition for children with DLD and LL and no information on the expectations of these children. The only extant study (Dockrell & Lindsay, 2007) did not include a quantitative measure of the child's own perspective, so we are unable to predict with any certainty which areas children may be looking forward to, or may find daunting, nor the optimal form that support at this time should take. This is vital information as improvements in educational support systems can improve outcomes for children with language needs (Conti-Ramsden et al., 2017).

The current study aimed to explore the expectations of the transition from primary to secondary school of children with DLD and children with LL, as well as their TD peers. It provides novel data by using quantitative measures to capture the child's voice during this critical developmental period. It also provides unique knowledge by exploring school concerns in relation to children's self-assessed strengths and weaknesses. Previous research has indicated that concerns prior to the transition to secondary school are associated with the quality of peer relationships, logistical understanding of the new environment and ability to do work (Evangelou et al., 2008; Gray, 2009). As children with DLD are known to have issues with these areas (Conti-Ramsden et al., 2014; Dockrell et al., 2007), we predicted that children with DLD and LL children would have greater school concern than their TD peers. We also predicted that these differences would be associated with between group differences in measures of social competence and peer relations (cf. Conti-Ramsden et al., 2013; Evangelou et al., 2008; Keay et al., 2015; McGee et al., 2003), scholastic competence (cf. Conti-Ramsden et al., 2014; Evangelou et al., 2008; Gray, 2009), emotion recognition (cf. Spackman et al., 2006), and emotional regulation skill (cf. Fujiki et al., 2002; Riglin et al., 2014).

## Method

### Participants

One hundred and seven children (aged 10-11 years) were recruited to the study from eight primary schools in the south-east of England. All students were in the last term of their final year of primary school. The protocol for this study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee at XXX. Verbal assent was obtained from all children and informed, written consent was provided by all parents, teachers, and headteachers.

Children with DLD ( $n = 30$ ) were currently on their school's SEND register due to language concerns and were receiving specialist support for this. Their DLD symptomatology was indicated by their teachers through completion of the Children's Communication Checklist 2 (CCC-2; Bishop, 2003b). All participants completed a battery of language assessments to confirm group membership. These assessments were the 'Recalling Sentences' subtest (measuring expressive and receptive narrative) and the 'Word Classes' subtest (Receptive and Expressive; measuring vocabulary) of the Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals-IV (UK), (Semel, Wiig & Secord, 2004), and the Test for Reception of Grammar 2 (TROG-2; Bishop, 2003a). Children with DLD obtained a score at or below 1.25SD below the population norm on both a receptive and an expressive language task. These standardized assessments report a score of below 1.25 SD to be indicative of impairment.

The LL group ( $n = 29$ ) included the students who did not meet the criteria for DLD yet scored at or below 1.25SD on one of the language tasks. Concerns as to their communicative ability were indicated by their teachers through completion of the Children's Communication Checklist 2 (CCC-2; Bishop, 2003b). Thus, they exhibited lower language

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ability that their peers included in the TD group but did not score at or below 1.25SD below the population norm on both a receptive and an expressive language task, as per the DLD group.

The TD group ( $n = 48$ ) consisted of 40 participants who achieved scores within 2SD of the population norm on all language tasks and eight participants who achieved scores within 2SD of the population norm on three of the language tasks and above 2SD of the population norm on one of the language tasks. No members of the TD group had a history of DLD or language delay.

The DLD, LL and TD groups did not differ in chronological age nor gender (see Table 1). In-line with their group status, the DLD and LL groups had lower scores on the language measures than their TD peers. They also had lower non-verbal ability (cf. Norbury et al., 2016), as assessed using the Matrix Reasoning subtest of the Wechsler Abbreviated Scale of Intelligence –Second Edition (WASI-II; Wechsler, 2011).

**Insert Table 1 here.**

### **Materials and Procedure**

Participants completed the test battery individually over two sessions in a quiet room at their school. In session one, children completed the Matrix Reasoning subtest of the WASI-II (Wechsler, 2011), followed by the ‘Recalling Sentences’ and ‘Word Classes’ subtests of the CELF-IV (Semel et al., 2004), and the TROG-2 (Bishop, 2003a). In session two, they completed the School Concerns Questionnaire (SCQ; Rice, Frederickson & Seymour, 2011) to determine their pre-transition feelings about the transition from primary to secondary school. This was followed by the KidScreen-27 (KIDSCREEN Group Europe, 2006), the Emotion Recognition task, the Self-Perception Profile for Children (SPPC; Harter,

1985) and the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire for Children and Adolescents, (ERQ-CA; Gullone & Taffe, 2012).

The SCQ (Rice et al, 2011) includes 20 items detailing common concerns about transition. Items tap social, logistical and academic aspects. Participants attribute a numerical value (1-10) to each, with lower numbers indicating less concern. The maximum score is 200 (obtained by the addition of individual item scores). This took approximately five minutes to complete. The SCQ has Cronbach's alphas of greater than .90 (Rice et al., 2011). The Cronbach's alpha of the SCQ in the current study was .92. Rice et al. (2011) identified three factors in an exploratory factor analysis of the SCQ. 'New Rules and Expectations', contains eight items (maximum score of 80). 'Social Situations' and 'Other Pupils', contain three items (maximum score of 30).

The KidScreen-27 (KIDSCREEN Group Europe, 2006) measures Health Related Quality of Life in 8-to-18-year-olds. It includes 27 items across 5 dimensions: Physical Well-being, Psychological Well-Being, Autonomy and Parent Relations, Social Support and Peers, and School Environment. Children self-rate statements on a 5-point Likert scale, evaluating each in the context of the past week. This results in an overall T score ( $M= 50$ ,  $SD =10$ ). Higher scores indicate more positive Health Related Quality of Life. This questionnaire was normed using a sample of 22,827 children (Ravens-Sieberer et al., 2007). The Cronbach's alpha of the KidScreen-27 in the current study was .83.

The emotion recognition task was developed using E-Prime 2.0. Participants were required to identify the emotion displayed by 48 facial stimuli (eight actors each displaying six emotions) selected from the NimStim set of facial stimuli (Tottenham et al., 2009) displayed on a laptop. The six emotions included are: anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness and surprise (cf. Spackman, Fujiki, Brinton, Nelson & Allen, 2005). Following task

instructions, all participants begin with a practice round. Each face was displayed for 3000ms (cf. Thomas, De Bellis, Graham & LaBar, 2007; Scrimin, Moscardino, Capello, Altoè & Axia, 2009) and was followed by the list of emotions. Participants made a forced choice response by selecting a number on the keyboard. Accuracy was recorded.

The SPPC (Harter, 1985) was used to assess participants' self-concept: 36 items evaluate self-concept in five domains: scholastic competence, social acceptance, athletic competence, physical appearance, behavioural conduct, and global self-worth. Each item consists of two opposite descriptions. Participants choose a description and indicate whether it is somewhat true or very true for them. Each item is scored on a four-point scale (higher scores reflect a more positive view of oneself). A total score is computed by summing items. The Cronbach's alpha of the SPPC in the current study was .92.

The ERQ-CA (Gullone & Taffe, 2012) provided a measure of participants' tendency to regulate their emotions in terms of 'cognitive reappraisal' (i.e. reshaping how one thinks about certain situations so that they take less of an emotional toll) and 'expressive suppression' (i.e. attempting to hide, inhibit or reduce ongoing emotion-expressive behaviour). Participants attribute a number from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) to each item. A total score is computed by summing relevant items. Gullone and Taffe (2012) found the alpha reliability coefficients to range from .69 to .85. The Cronbach's alpha of the ERQ-CA in the current study was .81 for Cognitive Reappraisal and .46 for Expressive Suppression.

## Results

Overall level of school concern was explored by group. Subsequently, predictors of school concern were analysed. Group differences between the three factors of the SCQ ('New Rules and Expectations'; 'Social Situations'; and 'Other Pupils') were explored and predictors thereof were examined.

### School Concern

School concern ranged from 20 to 163 ( $M = 78.47$ ;  $SD = 35.93$ ). Children with DLD had the highest level of school concern ( $M = 93.97$ ,  $SD = 41.52$ ), followed by children with LL ( $M = 80.28$ ,  $SD = 37.08$ ), then the TD children ( $M = 67.69$ ,  $SD = 24.22$ ). Group differences were significant,  $F(2, 106) = 5.40$ ,  $p = .006$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .09$  and post-hoc analysis using Gabriel's procedure revealed that the children with DLD had significantly more concerns than their TD peers ( $p = .004$ ,  $d = 1.39$ ). However, there was no significant difference between the TD and LL groups ( $p = .320$ ,  $d = .66$ ) or the LL and DLD groups ( $p = .342$ ,  $d = .72$ ).

### Predictors of School Concern.

Multiple regression analysis was conducted separately for each group, with total school concern score as the outcome variable and six predictor variables: scholastic competence, social competence, social support and peers, emotion recognition accuracy, cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. For descriptive statistics of each of these variables by group, please see Table 2. For the TD group the total model was significant,  $F(6, 47) = 3.46$ ,  $p = .007$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .34$ , and explained 34% of the variance in school concern. emotion recognition, expressive suppression and social competence were significant predictors (all  $p < .05$ ). For the LL group the total model was not significant,  $F(6, 28) = 1.27$ ,

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$p = .31$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .26$ . There were no significant predictors with only social competence nearing significance,  $p = .058$ . For the DLD group the total model was significant,  $F(6, 29) = 2.96$ ,  $p = .027$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .44$  and explained 44% of the variance in school concern; scholastic competence was the only significant predictor ( $p = .014$ ).

**Insert Table 2 here.**

**Insert Table 3 here.**

### School Concerns Questionnaire Factors

Due to the unequal number of items for SCQ factors, raw total scores were transformed into percentages to enable direct comparisons (please see Table 4). Mean scores show that for each factor, children with DLD had the highest level of concern, followed by children with LL, and TD children consistently had the lowest level of concern. Three one-way ANOVAs indicated significant differences between groups on all three factors (all  $p < .05$ ). Gabriel's post-hoc tests revealed that children with DLD had significantly more concerns than the TD children in Factor 1 New Rules and Expectations;  $p = .037$ ,  $d = .58$ , Factor 2 Social Situations;  $p = .042$ ,  $d = .49$  and Factor 3 Other Pupils;  $p = .016$ ,  $d = .76$ . However, there was no significant difference between the TD and LL groups for any of the three factors (all  $p > .2$ ), nor for the LL and DLD groups in any of the three factors (all  $p > .7$ ).

**Insert Table 4 here.**

#### **Predictors of new rules and expectations.**

For the TD group the total model was significant,  $F(6, 47) = 3.78$ ,  $p = .004$ , and explained 36% of the variance in New Rules and Expectations. Emotion recognition,

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expressive suppression and social competence were significant predictors (all  $p < .02$ ). For the LL group the total model was not significant,  $F(6, 28) = 1.56, p = .206$ . Scholastic competence was the only significant predictor,  $p = .047$ . For the DLD group the total model was significant,  $F(6, 29) = 2.80, p = .034$ , and explained 57% of the variance in New Rules and Expectations. Scholastic competence was the only significant predictor,  $p = .033$ .

**Insert Table 5 here.**

### **Predictors of social situations.**

For the TD group the total model was significant,  $F(6, 47) = 2.82, p = .022$ , and explained 29% of the variance in Social Situations. Again, emotion recognition, expressive suppression and social competence emerged as significant predictors (all  $p < .02$ ). For the LL group the total model was significant,  $F(6, 28) = 3.60, p = .012$ , and explained 50% of the variance in Social Situations. Emotion recognition and social competence were both significant predictors (both  $p < .02$ ). For the DLD group the total model was not significant,  $F(6, 29) = 1.22, p = .332$ . No individual factor emerged as a significant predictor, all  $p > .05$ .

**Insert Table 6 here.**

### **Predictors of other pupils.**

For the TD group the total model was significant,  $F(6, 47) = 3.59, p = .006$ , and explained 35% of the variance in Other Pupils. Scholastic competence and social competence were significant predictors (both  $p < .02$ ). However, the model was not significant for either the LL group,  $F(6, 28) = .80, p = .579$ , nor the DLD group,  $F(6, 29) = 1.70, p = .166$ , with no individual factor significantly predicting Other Pupils, all  $p > .05$ .

**Insert Table 7 here.**



### **Discussion**

This study aimed to explore the expectations of the transition from primary to secondary school for children with DLD, children with LL and their TD peers; and to examine the predictors of these concerns between groups. Importantly, the child's own voice was captured and school concern was considered both as a unitary construct and in terms of sub-factors. Children with DLD reported significantly higher levels of concern than their TD peers, but the LL and TD groups and the DLD and LL groups did not differ. Predictors of school concern significantly differed between groups with concerns of children with DLD predicted by scholastic competence, only social competence nearing significance as a predictor of the concerns of children with LL and concerns of TD children predicted by emotion recognition, expressive suppression and social competence. Interestingly, when sub-factors of school concerns were examined these predictors remained quite consistent in terms of the sub-factor New Rules and Expectations yet this trend did not continue when the sub-factors of Social Situations and Other Pupils were examined.

### **School Concerns During Transition from Primary to Secondary School**

As expected, children with DLD had significantly higher levels of concern regarding their transition to secondary school than their TD peers. This is unsurprising given the needs of children with DLD in areas such as peer relationships, new environments and scholastic competence (Conti-Ramsden et al., 2014; Dockrell et al., 2007; Lindsay & Dockrell, 2012; Lindsay et al., 2010); areas which have been associated with concerns of TD children at this time (Evangelou et al., 2008; Gray, 2009). However, due to the large standard deviations of the overall school concerns scores and the relatively small effect sizes, future research is warranted. It was hypothesised that these concerns would be associated with between group differences in measures of social competence and peer relations (cf. Conti-Ramsden et al.,

2013; Evangelou et al., 2008; Keay et al., 2015; McGee et al., 2003), scholastic competence (cf. Conti-Ramsden et al., 2014; Evangelou et al., 2008; Gray, 2009), emotion recognition (cf. Spackman et al., 2006), and emotional regulation skill (cf. Fujiki et al., 2002; Riglin et al., 2014); these domains will now be discussed in turn.

Previous research indicates that concerns in the lead up to the transition to secondary school are associated with the quality of peer relationships (cf. Dockrell et al., 2007; Evangelou et al., 2008; Gray, 2009; Ng-Knight et al., 2018.). Initial analysis revealed a significant difference in social competence between the TD group and both language impaired groups (DLD and LL) and individual group analysis of the predictors of transition concerns showed that while the TD group's concerns were predicted by social competence, this was not the case for either the DLD or LL groups. Analysis of the sub-factors showed that in specifically social domains (Factor 2 – Social Situations), social competence does become a predictor for children with LL (and remains a predictor for TD children) but still does not predict the concerns of children with DLD.

A successful school transition is facilitated by emotional competency (Riglin et al., 2014), thus it was predicted that emotion recognition skill and emotional regulation would predict school concern for all children, but particularly those with DLD, who have an increased likelihood of emotional difficulties (cf. Fujiki et al., 2002; Norbury et al., 2016; Spackman et al., 2006; Yew & O'Kearney, 2013). Importantly, emotional regulation was not merely considered as a unitary construct, but cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression were examined separately. As expected, TD children were significantly more accurate in their recognition of emotion from facial stimuli than children with DLD (cf. Spackman et al., 2006). However, analysis found that emotion recognition and emotion regulation (expressive suppression) emerged as predictors of overall school concern only for

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the TD group. In analysis of the factors of the SCQ, the TD group remains the only group to have concerns predicted by emotion regulation skill, with both New Rules and Expectations and Social Situations being predicted by expressive suppression. Notably, for the LL group, again it is only for the specifically social concerns (Factor 2 – Social Situations) that emotion recognition emerges as a significant predictor.

The importance of “the ability to do work”, i.e. scholastic concerns, has also been highlighted as a key factor in anticipation of the transition (Evangelou et al., 2008; Gray, 2009). It was therefore predicted that self-perceived scholastic competence would emerge as a predictor of school concern. It was also hypothesised that this effect would be exacerbated in children with DLD, as they tend to have lower academic performance than their TD peers (Durkin et al, 2014; Dockrell et al, 2007). Indeed, scholastic competence was found to be significant predictor of overall school concern for the DLD group and not for either the LL or the TD group. Interestingly, scholastic competence is also a predictor of New Rules and Expectations for the LL group (and remains a predictor for the DLD group). It did not predict the concerns of the TD group for any factor.

Other Pupils, the third factor of the SCQ (comprised of three items: Homework, Older Children and Being Bullied), is conspicuous in its non-adherence to the pattern set by the results of the analysis of overall school concern and the first two factors, New Rules and Expectations and Social Situations. For this factor, the predictors of TD concerns are markedly different, with social competence and scholastic competence emerging as significant predictors and emotion recognition, expressive suppression and social competence (previously so constant) not appearing as significant predictors. The LL and DLD groups have been more changeable in response to the different factors of the SCQ yet for this factor no significant predictors emerge for either group.

### **Implications and Future Research**

Currently, interventions targeting the transition to secondary school vary widely between schools. The results of this study make it apparent that tailored intervention targeting different areas for children with different language profiles would be beneficial and highlights the need for research designed to advise this. For children with DLD, self-perceived scholastic competence is the key indicator of transition concerns. This suggests that interventions targeting scholastic confidence may be the most efficient use of resources for these children. Targeting scholastic competence may also benefit children with LL in terms of concerns about the New Rules and Expectations at secondary level. However, concerns about Social Situations may be reduced by building emotion recognition skill and self-perceived social competence. The concerns of TD children are overall more consistently predicted by a range of core social and emotional skills; emotion recognition, expressive suppression and social competence. These results would suggest that interventions involving skill building exercise in emotional recognition and regulation would be beneficial.

### **Study Evaluation**

The importance of the voice of the child was highlighted as key rationale for this study, and as a first step quantitative methods were employed. However, it will be important for future research to extend investigations to include a qualitative aspect, as this would offer a greater depth of information on the expectations of children at this time. Additionally, this research is cross-sectional and explores the expectations of a group of children in their final year of primary school, immediately prior to their transition to secondary school. Further exploration, following the move to secondary school, would importantly include actual experience and adopt a longitudinal approach.

### **Conclusion**

This study examined the primary to secondary school transition expectations of children with DLD, LL and TD and included quantitative measures of the voice of these children. Results indicate a greater magnitude of concern felt by children with DLD and LL relative to their TD peers. Additionally, predictors of school concerns differed between groups; TD concerns were predicted by emotion recognition, expressive suppression and social competence; LL overall school concerns were not predicted by any one variable but were more situational with social and emotional competency predicting different domains; whilst DLD group concerns were largely predicted by scholastic competence. These results may indicate that provision made by primary and secondary schools to facilitate a successful transition should not be uniform but should target different areas depending on language proficiency. Further research is needed to inform relevant intervention strategies.

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## EXPECTATIONS OF SCHOOL TRANSITION IN DLD

**Table 1**

*Participant Gender Breakdown, Language Skill and Cognitive Ability Standard Scores by Group*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Typically Developing Mean (SD) n =48</b>	<b>Low Language Mean (SD) n =29</b>	<b>Developmental Language Disorder Mean (SD) n =30</b>	<b>Test statistics</b>
<b>Gender</b> Male Female	26 22	11 18	12 18	$\chi^2 (2, N=107) = 2.48, p = .289, \phi = .15$
<b>Chronological Age (Years )</b>	10.84 <sup>a</sup> (0.23)	10.86 <sup>a</sup> (.23)	10.82 <sup>a</sup> (0.26)	$F (2, 106) = 0.23, p = .796, \eta_p^2 = .01$
<b>WASI-II Matrix Reasoning (T-score)</b>	54.17 <sup>a</sup> (9.22)	48.69 <sup>b</sup> (7.57)	41.97 <sup>b</sup> (9.68)	$F (2, 106) = 17.26, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .25$
<b>Language skill:</b>				
CELF Recalling Sentences (Scaled score)	11.27 <sup>a</sup> (1.85)	9.14 <sup>b</sup> (2.23)	7.13 <sup>c</sup> (3.61)	$F (2, 106) = 24.70, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .32$
CELF Vocabulary Word Classes Receptive (Scaled score)	12.69 <sup>a</sup> (2.69)	9.38 <sup>b</sup> (2.04)	5.87 <sup>c</sup> (1.50)	$F (2, 106) = 86.45, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .62$
CELF Vocabulary Word Classes Expressive (Scaled score)	13.90 <sup>a</sup> (2.47)	10.66 <sup>b</sup> (1.65)	5.93 <sup>c</sup> (2.00)	$F (2, 106) = 127.17, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .71$
Test for Reception of Grammar (Standard score)	106.33 <sup>a</sup> (6.43)	92.76 <sup>a</sup> (16.78)	91.33 <sup>b</sup> (15.73)	$F (2, 106) = 16.65, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .24$

*Note:* <sup>a b c</sup> Values with the same superscript do not differ when  $p < .05$

## EXPECTATIONS OF SCHOOL TRANSITION IN DLD

**Table 2**

*Participant Psychosocial Measure Scores by Group*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Typically Developing Mean (SD) <i>n</i> =29</b>	<b>Low Language Mean (SD) <i>n</i> =12</b>	<b>Developmental Language Disorder Mean (SD) <i>n</i> =13</b>	<b><i>Test statistics</i></b>
Self-Perception Profile for Children Scholastic Competence	14.43 <sup>a</sup> (4.27)	13.19 <sup>a</sup> (4.18)	11.79 <sup>a</sup> (4.03)	$F(2, 106) = 3.85, p = .024, \eta_p^2 = .07$
Self-Perception Profile for Children Social Competence	14.02 <sup>a</sup> (5.07)	11.66 <sup>a</sup> (4.44)	12.41 <sup>b</sup> (3.98)	$F(2, 106) = 2.23, p = .113, \eta_p^2 = .04$
KidScreen Social Support and Peers	49.84 <sup>a</sup> (11.22)	54.28 <sup>a</sup> (11.82)	50.64 <sup>a</sup> (9.36)	$F(2, 106) = 1.52, p = .224, \eta_p^2 = .03$
Emotion Recognition Accuracy Percentage	86.85 <sup>a</sup> (6.93)	80.96 <sup>a,b</sup> (8.02)	78.40 <sup>b</sup> (10.92)	$F(2, 106) = 10.12, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .16$
Emotional Regulation Cognitive Reappraisal	20.00 <sup>a</sup> (4.53)	22.31 <sup>a</sup> (4.425)	21.21 <sup>a</sup> (5.04)	$F(2, 106) = 1.75, p = .178, \eta_p^2 = .03$
Emotional Regulation Expressive Suppression	11.87 <sup>a</sup> (2.91)	11.21 <sup>a</sup> (2.62)	10.83 <sup>a</sup> (2.93)	$F(2, 106) = 1.22, p = .300, \eta_p^2 = .02$

*Note:* <sup>a b c d</sup> Values with the same superscript do not differ when  $p < .05$



## EXPECTATIONS OF SCHOOL TRANSITION IN DLD

**Table 3**

*Regression Analysis Predicting Overall School Concern*

	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	Zero-order correlation	Semi-partial correlation
<b>TD Group</b>					
Scholastic Competence	.22	1.64	.108	.25	.21
Social Competence*	.59	3.57	.001	.27	.45
Social Support and Peers	.29	1.73	.092	-.01	.22
Emotion Recognition*	.33	2.35	.023	.21	.30
Cognitive Reappraisal	.03	.17	.868	.04	.02
Expressive Suppression*	-.36	-2.60	.014	-.16	-.33
<b>LL Group</b>					
Scholastic Competence	.28	1.49	.151	.21	.27
Social Competence	.40	2.00	.058	.37	.37
Social Support and Peers	-.14	-.70	.492	-.13	-.13
Emotion Recognition	-.21	-1.09	.286	-.22	-.20
Cognitive Reappraisal	.21	.95	.353	-.07	.17
Expressive Suppression	.03	.13	.899	-.05	.02
<b>DLD Group</b>					
Scholastic Competence*	.46	2.66	.014	.47	.42
Social Competence	.10	.63	.534	.26	.10
Social Support and Peers	.16	.96	.345	.15	.15
Emotion Recognition	-.27	-1.62	.119	-.41	-.25
Cognitive Reappraisal	.17	1.00	.326	.09	.16
Expressive Suppression	-.15	-.86	.398	-.28	-.14

Note: \*Significant when  $p < .05$

## EXPECTATIONS OF SCHOOL TRANSITION IN DLD

**Table 4**

*Subfactors of the School Concerns Questionnaire as identified by Rice et al. (2011) by Group*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Typically Developing Mean % (SD %) n =48</b>	<b>Low Language Mean % (SD %) n =29</b>	<b>Developmental Language Disorder Mean % (SD %) n =30</b>	<b>Test statistics</b>
Factor 1: New Rules and Expectations	32.11 <sup>a</sup> (14.17)	39.59 <sup>ab</sup> (18.97)	43.04 <sup>b</sup> (23.80)	$F(2, 106) = 3.52,$ $p = .033, \eta_p^2 = .06$
Factor 2: Social Situations	22.08 <sup>a</sup> (12.97)	27.47 <sup>ab</sup> (19.85)	31.33 <sup>b</sup> (16.51)	$F(2, 106) = 3.20,$ $p = .045, \eta_p^2 = .06$
Factor 3: Other Pupils	41.11 <sup>a</sup> (20.75)	45.06 <sup>ab</sup> (20.42)	55.56 <sup>b</sup> (24.93)	$F(2, 106) = 4.07,$ $p = .020, \eta_p^2 = .07$

*Note:* <sup>a b c</sup> Values with the same superscript do not differ when  $p < .05$

## EXPECTATIONS OF SCHOOL TRANSITION IN DLD

**Table 5**

*Regression Analysis Predicting Factor 1 – New Rules and Expectations for all groups*

	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	Zero-order correlation	Semi-partial correlation
<b>TD Group</b>					
Scholastic Competence	.13	.98	.334	.18	.12
Social Competence*	.64	3.97	.000	.31	.50
Social Support and Peers	.26	1.62	.112	-.04	.20
Emotion Recognition*	.35	2.57	.014	.20	.32
Cognitive Reappraisal	-.02	-.14	.889	.01	-.02
Expressive Suppression*	-.41	-2.95	.005	-.18	-.37
<b>LL Group</b>					
Scholastic Competence*	.38	2.10	.047	.31	.38
Social Competence	.37	1.93	.067	.32	.34
Social Support and Peers	-.16	-.81	.429	-.11	-.14
Emotion Recognition	-.23	-1.22	.236	-.20	-.22
Cognitive Reappraisal	.28	1.32	.202	-.01	.24
Expressive Suppression	.04	.19	.849	-.05	.03
<b>DLD Group</b>					
Scholastic Competence*	.40	2.26	.033	.40	.36
Social Competence	.04	.22	.830	.18	.03
Social Support and Peers	.19	1.11	.279	.21	.18
Emotion Recognition	-.32	-1.92	.067	-.46	-.30
Cognitive Reappraisal	.13	.80	.434	.08	.13
Expressive Suppression	-.18	-1.04	.311	-.33	-.16

Note: \*Significant when  $p < .05$

## EXPECTATIONS OF SCHOOL TRANSITION IN DLD

**Table 6**

*Regression Analysis Predicting Factor 2 – Social Situations for all groups*

	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	Zero-order correlation	Semi-partial correlation
<b>TD Group</b>					
Scholastic Competence	-.13	-.93	.357	-.05	-.12
Social Competence*	.47	2.78	.008	.14	.37
Social Support and Peers	.31	1.79	.081	.03	.24
Emotion Recognition*	.42	2.92	.006	.23	.38
Cognitive Reappraisal	-.28	-1.85	.071	-.13	-.24
Expressive Suppression*	-.38	-2.59	.013	-.21	-.34
<b>LL Group</b>					
Scholastic Competence	-.01	-.09	.929	-.10	-.01
Social Competence*	.56	3.42	.002	.58	.52
Social Support and Peers	-.10	-.61	.548	-.16	-.09
Emotion Recognition*	-.40	-2.54	.019	-.46	-.39
Cognitive Reappraisal	.21	1.16	.260	-.14	.18
Expressive Suppression	.03	.21	.834	-.04	.03
<b>DLD Group</b>					
Scholastic Competence	.15	.77	.451	.22	.14
Social Competence	.26	1.35	.191	.32	.24
Social Support and Peers	-.03	-.17	.871	-.04	-.03
Emotion Recognition	-.20	-1.07	.297	-.27	-.19
Cognitive Reappraisal	.24	1.25	.223	.22	.23
Expressive Suppression	-.08	-.41	.683	-.17	-.08

Note: \*Significant when  $p < .05$

## EXPECTATIONS OF SCHOOL TRANSITION IN DLD

**Table 7**

*Regression Analysis Predicting Factor 3 – Other Pupils for all groups*

	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	Zero-order correlation	Semi-partial correlation
<b>TD Group</b>					
Scholastic Competence*	.35	2.60	.013	.39	.33
Social Competence*	.46	3.01	.004	.39	.38
Social Support and Peers	.13	.79	.432	-.18	.10
Emotion Recognition	.20	1.45	.155	.16	.18
Cognitive Reappraisal	.09	.65	.519	-.03	.08
<b>LL Group</b>					
Scholastic Competence	.29	1.48	.154	.25	.28
Social Competence	.25	1.22	.234	.28	.23
Social Support and Peers	-.10	-.47	.640	-.13	-.09
Emotion Recognition	-.15	-.74	.466	-.17	-.14
Cognitive Reappraisal	.02	.07	.944	-.18	.01
<b>DLD Group</b>					
Scholastic Competence	.38	2.01	.056	.43	.34
Social Competence	.22	1.20	.241	.34	.20
Social Support and Peers	.10	.58	.564	.05	.10
Emotion Recognition	-.20	-1.13	.270	-.30	-.19
Cognitive Reappraisal	.15	.84	.412	.06	.14

Note: \*Significant when  $p < .05$