

## **TRANSCRIPT: Oral skills focus group**

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A lot of our students have poor oral motor skills and whilst the session can't make any massive changes, it's really more about maintaining the skills that they have. Without that sort of input the students' speech can deteriorate quite quickly. Each term we focus on a different aspect. Today we were looking at the skills of lip closure and blowing and these skills are beneficial not only in supporting students with their speech, but also their eating skills, as well.

Often children who have poor oral motor skills have very poor jaw rotation and lip closure and they may find it difficult to bite and, frequently, they will eat with their mouths open. From a health and safety point of view, obviously, we need to encourage children to break their food down, to chew it and to be able to get the tongue to move around the palate to clear off any food before they swallow. So even though we do oral skills to help with their speech, it's very much hand-in-hand with their eating.

We always begin with addressing what the aim of the session's going to be. So it was going to be blowing hard and soft and it's important for the children to note the difference between the two, and they were able to demonstrate that quite beautifully with the movement of the scarf.

We then used stars and planets to move around the exploration tray and the students were given the choice of the length of straw that they would like to use.

We finished with something that was the perfect example of showing how to blow softly - 'cause if you blew hard you wouldn't get any bubbles - and the students not only enjoyed blowing the bubbles but popping everybody else's as well. You're never too old for bubbles!

In fact, the students don't feel like they're working at all and, if you ask them, they will say that what they're doing helps them to talk and to eat but I think the main thing is that they have fun whilst they do it. The children here often have a limited lifespan, and this is a special school and we want to make their time here special and we want them to have fun. We want them to go home with smiles on their faces at the end of the day.