



Press Release

For Immediate Release – 06/07/2011

TALK OF ‘TESTS FOR TOTS’ DISMISSED BY SPEECH AND LANGUAGE COALITION

Government today outlines revised early years strategy, with plans to prioritise language and communication, within the Early Years Foundation Stage

The Communication Trust, a 40-strong coalition of voluntary organisations with expertise in supporting children’s speech, language and communication who are leading the National Year of Communication, has today welcomed Government’s commitment to place communication and language at the heart of changes to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

Government plans to accept many of Dame Clare Tickell’s recommendations to the EYFS have been met warmly by The Communication Trust – including plans for speech, language and communication checks for children before three and for practitioners to report directly to parents on their child’s communication and language.

Anita Kerwin-Nye, Director of The Communication Trust, says; “The Government has accepted calls from the voluntary sector to check children for speech, language and communication difficulties before the age of three. This is not ‘Tot Testing’ for testing sake, communication difficulties are the single biggest disability issue facing pre-school children today. The bottom line is that early identification makes the biggest difference to children’s outcomes.

“Much of this ‘testing’ can be done through observation, normal interaction and playing. Parents tell us time and time again that they wished their child’s communication difficulty had been picked up in the early years. They are the first to shout about the results of early intervention and the proposed Government changes will ultimately result in more parents feeling supported and aware of how their child’s speech and language is developing.

“The real test is how these changes will be applied locally and how we can ensure staff are skilled in supporting children’s communication and identifying when they are struggling. The Communication Trust looks forward to continuing their work supporting the workforce in these areas.

“Through our work, and that of the *Hello* campaign (national year of communication), we are providing ongoing guidance for early years practitioners in this area and have successfully established 7 units on the Qualifications and Credits Framework. This includes for the first time a mandatory unit on speech, language and communication in the new Level 3 Diploma for the Children and Young People’s Workforce. We have also developed free resources for early years practitioners, including ‘ages and stages booklets’, available at www.hello.org.uk/resources.”

Speech, language and communication are fundamental to the overall development of children and young people, however in the UK over 1 million children struggle. In areas of social deprivation, upwards of 50% of children start school with delayed language affecting their ability to learn and make friends. Difficulties can impact across learning, behaviour, social interaction and self esteem.

2011 is officially the National Year of Communication, known as the *Hello* campaign, which is being run by The Communication Trust in partnership with Jean Gross, the Government’s Communication Champion for Children. *Hello* aims to make children and young people’s communication development a priority in homes and schools across the UK.

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For more information or to speak to Anita Kerwin-Nye, Director of The Communication Trust, please contact Laura Smith at the Communication Trust via lsmith@thecommunicationtrust.org.uk or 020 7843 2519 / 07766651366.

About The Communication Trust and the *Hello* campaign

- The Communication Trust raises awareness of speech, language and communication issues amongst everyone that works with children and young people. It was founded by Afasic, BT, CDC (Council for Disabled Children) and children’s communication charity I CAN.
 - The Communication Trust manages a coalition of 40 voluntary organisations and an advisory group that includes the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, Association of Educational Psychologists and the General Teaching Council.
 - The Trust’s work is supported by the Department for Education and other funders. More information can be found at www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk.
- Hello* is the national year of communication – a campaign to increase understanding of how important it is for children and young people to develop good communication skills.
- The campaign is run by The Communication Trust in partnership with Jean Gross, the Government’s Communication Champion. Together we aim to make 2011 the year when children’s communication skills become a priority in schools and homes across the country.
 - The campaign is supported by BT and Pearson Assessment and is backed by the Department for Education and Department for Health. Please visit www.hello.org.uk for further information.