

Press statement – 9.12.11

Communication consortium expresses concern about Phonics Screening Check

The Communication Trust, a consortium of nearly 50 leading voluntary sector organisations specialising in speech, language and communication in children and young people, has expressed its concern over plans to roll out the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check. The results from the first round of screening have today been published by the Department for Education.

The Phonics Screening Check is a short, light-touch assessment to confirm whether pupils have learned phonic decoding to an appropriate standard. It also identifies children who need extra help so they can receive extra support to improve their reading skills. They can then retake the check so schools can track them until they can decode.

But independent evaluation undertaken by Sheffield Hallam University showed most teachers still had difficulties in judging whether a word was read correctly, including in children who were good readers but had speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).

Anita Kerwin-Nye, director of The Communication Trust, said: “We fully support the Government’s ambition to improve literacy standards in English schools, and welcome the Department for Education’s support for communication, language and literacy in the Early Years Foundation stage.

“However we are very concerned about the impact the Year 1 Phonics Screen, and the wider emphasis on phonics, on children with speech, language and communication needs. This concern is backed up by the findings of the evaluation carried out by Sheffield Hallam University. This showed that nearly 29 per cent of schools felt the experience of the Phonics Screening Check was negative for children with SLCN and that only 35 per cent felt the check accurately assessed the decoding abilities of children with speech difficulties.

“These figures alone suggest significant changes need to be made to the way the Screen is implemented and I have urgently requested a meeting with Nick Gibb MP, Minister of State for Education to discuss the precise details. Phonics is a valid approach to teaching reading but it is essential that it is delivered as part of a well-rounded approach to communication and literacy skills.”

-Ends-

For more information, contact Lynne Milford, Press Officer, on 0207 843 2564 or email lmilford@thecommunicationtrust.org.uk

Notes for editors

- The Communication Trust works to ensure that all children can communicate and particularly supports those children who have speech, language and communication needs
- Over 1 million children have persistent speech, language and communication needs that need expert support. Many more need additional help to catch up with their peers.
- The Communication Trust is a coalition of nearly 50 leading voluntary sector organisations with expertise across all areas of speech, language and communication and an advisory group, which includes the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists
- The Trust ran *Hello* the national year of communication – in conjunction with Jean Gross, the Government’s Communication Champion for Children – aiming to make children’s communication a priority in homes and schools across the UK. The Trust was one of the campaigning voices that secured the Bercow Review in 2008, which ultimately led to the year of communication.
- For more information about the Trust visit www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk or www.hello.org.uk