



The Communication Trust
Every child understood

2017

No Pens Day Wednesday

Evaluation Findings

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Introduction

No Pens Day Wednesday (NPDW) 2017 was the seventh year of The Communication Trust's national speaking and listening event. This year we were able to reach over 1,000 new schools and settings, taking our total number of sign ups to over 7,000!

Following on from the day, we held an online survey with schools that had taken part in order to find out what people had enjoyed about the day, what could be improved in the future and the impact that it had on increasing awareness of speech, language and communication. In total, over 180 people took part in our survey. This report summarises all of the important things we've learned.

As of 2017, over **7,000** schools and settings have signed up to NPDW since it started in 2011. The numbers have increased every year, with 792 total sign ups in 2012, 1,835 in 2013, 3,616 in 2014, 4,810 in 2015, 5,724 in 2016 and 7,018 in 2017. By our estimations, this means that No Pens Day Wednesday has reached a total of almost two million children and young people!

No Pens Day 2017 saw the Trust catering for further education (FE) settings for the first time, with 15 new FE lesson plans added to the website. One of our goals in extending the day to an FE audience is to ensure that young people have the communication skills that will allow them to thrive when they leave education.

80% of respondents said that taking part in NPDW 2017 raised their awareness of speech, language and communication needs. 96% said they'd do things differently around school as a result of their involvement, and 19% of respondents reported they had identified pupils who were struggling with spoken language that they'd not known about before.

On social media, the #nopensday hashtag was used over 500 times by schools on tweets and pictures, the majority of which were retweeted on our own twitter page @Comm_nTrust. The day before No Pens Day Wednesday, October 3rd, was The Communication Trust website's most popular day for the past two years, with a total of 8,500 page views!

The most popular reasons for schools and settings taking part were: "To support our school/setting's focus on the spoken language elements of the curriculum" (76%)

"We think it's a fun and engaging initiative" (74%)

"We wanted to improve our pupils' understanding of the importance of speaking and listening skills" (73%)

"We wanted to improve staff understanding of the importance of speaking and listening skills" (65%)

If you have any questions about No Pens Day Wednesday or this evaluation please get in touch with Jack Williams, Project Officer at The Communication Trust on jwilliams@thecomunicationtrust.org.uk



The growing numbers of No Pens Day Wednesday...

For No Pens Day Wednesday 2017, we had a total of **1,294** brand new schools and settings sign up to take part. As with No Pens Day 2014, 2015 and 2016, we have ensured that our figures are as accurate as possible by manually interrogating the sign up data to ensure that no duplicate schools are present.

The figures below show that the numbers have increased significantly every year:

This takes our total to **7,018** schools and settings signed up to take part in No Pens Day Wednesday! It is important to take into consideration that the actual figures are likely to be significantly higher as we did not begin tracking sign ups to the day until No Pens Day Wednesday 2012. In addition to this, it is possible for schools to pass the link to the materials on to others once they've accessed it (although we try to discourage this), so it is very possible that there are a significant number of schools and settings accessing the resources whose details we haven't been able to capture in our statistics.

In terms of individual children and young people reached by the event, this figure is even more impressive – using DfE school and pupil numbers data, we estimate this number to be over two million pupils.



Who took part?

As in all previous years, primary schools were the largest group represented in the survey, which corresponds with the fact that they are the most engaged audience across the Trust's programme of work.

We are also very pleased to see that there has been an increase in special school sign ups, although the number of sign ups from early years settings has decreased.

It's great to see that we retained a similar number of secondary schools and FE institutions to both 2015 and 2016, with a figure of **12%**. There has also been a large jump of over **10%** within the 'other' category, which includes pupil referral units, hospital schools and international schools.

NPDW sign up breakdown

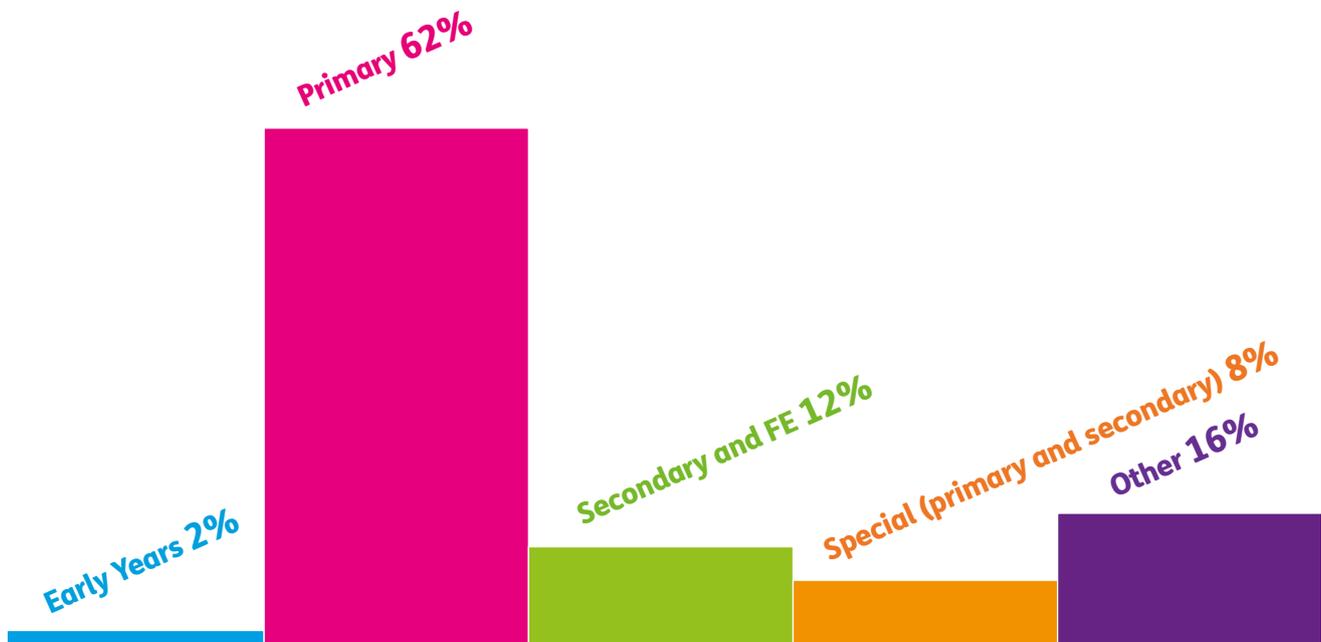


Table 1: Types of school/settings who signed up in 2017

How schools heard about NPDW

The table below shows how people heard about *No Pens Day Wednesday* this year. As in previous years, the direct email from the Trust was the way the majority of respondents found out about the event, with just under half of *No Pens Day* participants discovering the day through this route. It was fantastic to see that there was an increase in people learning about the day through other schools and settings and from their local authority, with the figure for the latter almost doubling. In addition to this, twice the number of people found out about the day through social media in 2017 compared to the previous year, highlighting the fact that our Facebook and Twitter audiences are continuing to grow.

The ‘other’ category has also remained consistently strong, with just under a fifth of respondents choosing this option, suggesting that people are continuing to learn about the day through a wide, diverse range of sources.

The most popular answers within the ‘other’ category included people hearing about the day from their school’s senior leadership, from specialist sector magazines, speech and language therapists and via internet search engines.

How people heard about NPDW

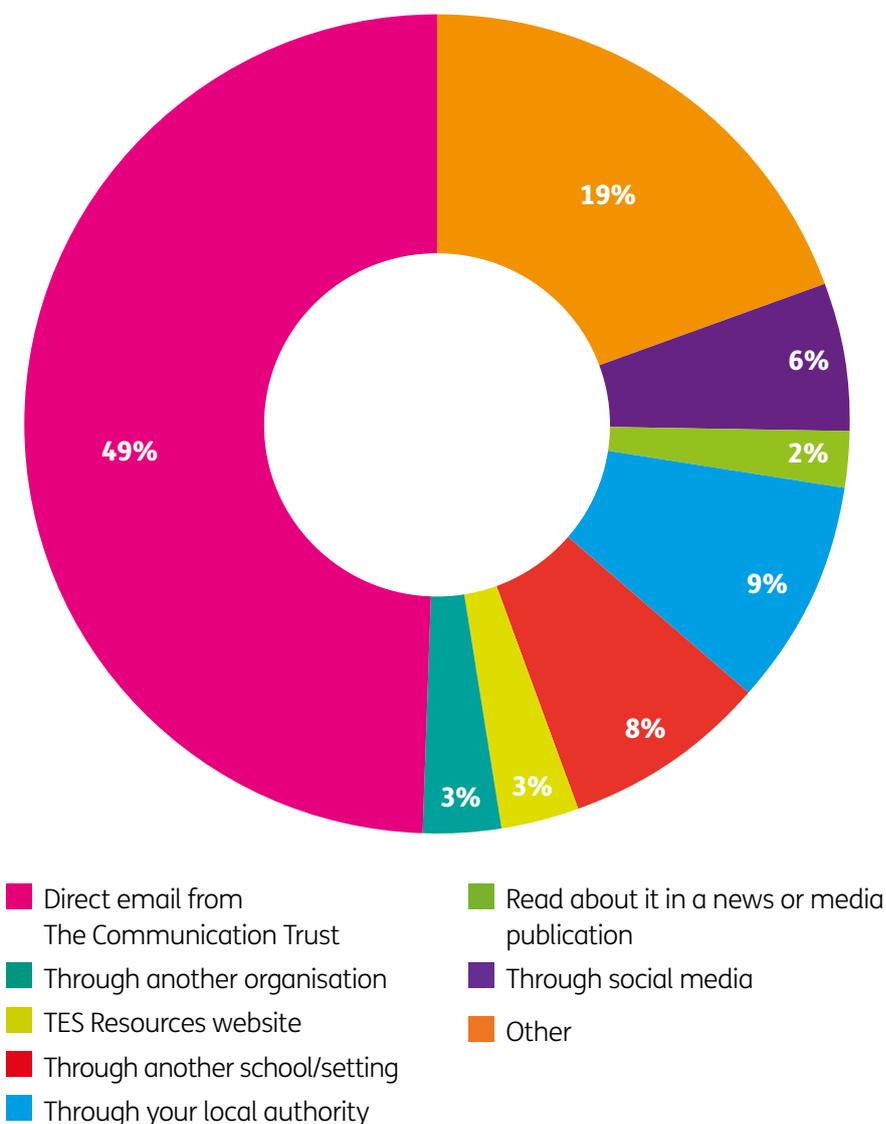


Table 2: How did you find out about *No Pens Day Wednesday* this year?

Schools who'd taken part before and reasons for taking part

Almost **58%** of respondents to the survey said that they'd taken part before, highlighting the fact that we have not only been successful in expanding our reach and attracting new schools and settings to the event, but that we have also managed to retain a core audience base from previous *No Pens Day Wednesdays*.

There were a variety of reasons that made people decide to take part in the day. The most popular reason was that practitioners wanted to 'support [their] school/setting's focus on the spoken language elements of the curriculum', which is very pleasing to see, as we are regularly campaigning for speech, language and communication to be given more priority within the curriculum.

It was fantastic to see that there was a **3%** increase from *No Pens Day Wednesday 2016* in schools taking part after a recommendation from another school or setting, both in the fact that schools are recommending good practice to one another and that they consider *No Pens Day* to be good practice. It was also great to see that 73% of respondents took part in the day because they wanted 'to improve [their] pupils' understanding of the importance of speaking and listening skills', as ultimately, this is one of the core aims of the day.

In addition to this, we saw an **8%** increase in the answer 'we have run it successfully before', which again is a positive response, as it means that we are retaining participants from previous years who have enjoyed the day in the past. Finally, we were happy to see that the number of schools using the day to 'improve staff understanding of the importance of speaking and listening skills' has remained relatively consistent; we have learned through our case study work that there have been many occasions in schools where teachers were initially reluctant or unsure about doing a day of speaking and listening activities, only to realise how important these skills were after the day had taken place.

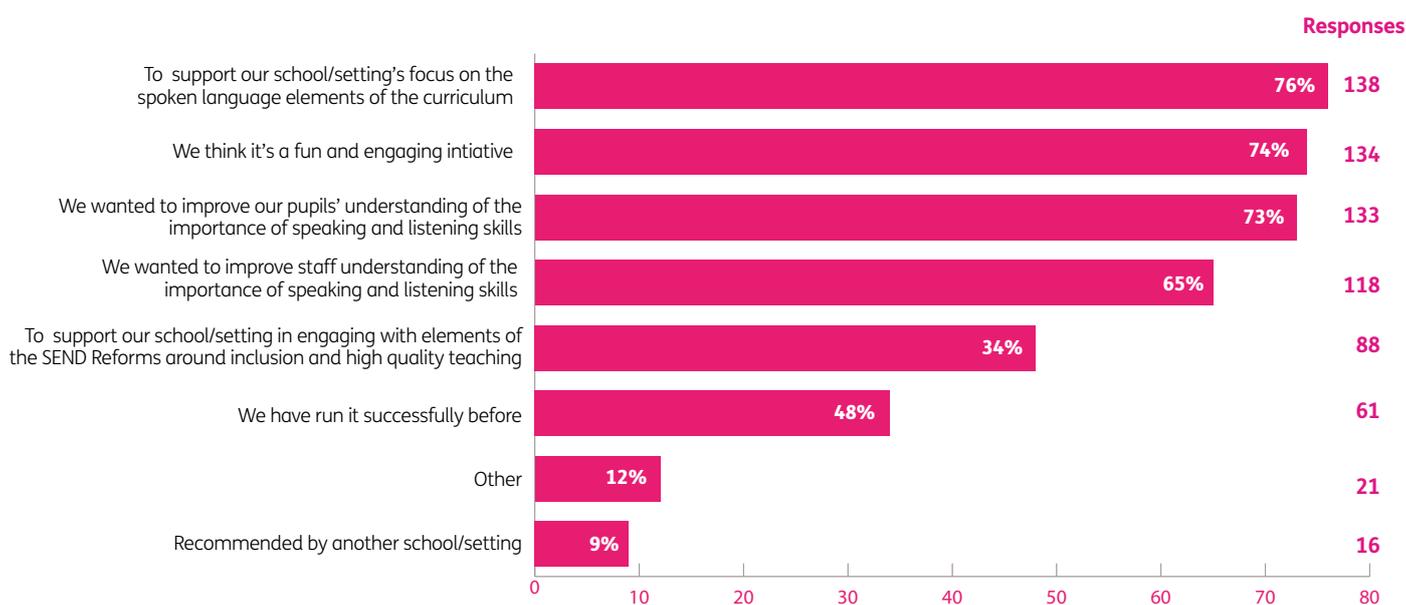


Table 3: Reasons for taking part in *No Pens Day Wednesday*

No Pens Day Wednesday 2017: Evaluation findings

This is a selection of reasons for taking part in No Pens Day given for the 'other' category.

It was wonderful to see such a varied list of answers given and in particular to hear that a school was dedicating a whole year to the furthering of literacy and oracy skills!

“I think it is a fantastic idea and works in well with the promotion of oral language, which I am helping to increase teachers’ understanding of the importance of this in the classroom. I hope to be able to help my schools implement it in future.”

“We are running a year of literacy and oracy, and this dovetailed perfectly.”

“We wanted to demonstrate to children that they learn as much, if not more, through speaking and listening and not just writing.”

“To encourage staff to think more carefully about using spoken language and listening skills in their everyday teaching. Many staff said that it changed their outlook on how lessons could be completed without the use of a pen/pencil.”

“The teachers thought the lesson plans and resource ideas were great and really helped them to plan for the day.”



No Pens Day Wednesday 2017: Evaluation findings



Some of the feedback schools provided on the resources:

“I think the resources on the website are excellent.”

“The students were engaged in the assembly presentation which motivated them to talk about No Pens Wednesday.”

“There were lots of ideas to fit with our school themes and also ones that could be easily adapted for different topics. Some of the ideas are going to be used in the future too.”

“We also created a ‘No Pens Day’ display celebrating the things we did.”



'The best thing about No Pens Day Wednesday...'

Respondents to our evaluation survey were also asked what the best thing about No Pens Day Wednesday was – it was lovely to receive such a large, varied selection of positive statements! We have included a selection of them here:



Children's reactions, engagement and enthusiasm

"It was so beneficial and resourceful. All my students were involved in the listening and speaking skills. They were highly motivated while communicating with one another."

"The children loved the idea of a whole day with 'no pens' - we often have 'no pen' lessons but don't draw attention to it. Three classes really enjoyed 'no pens' maths exploring ideas verbally with lots of reasoning. Two classes enjoyed performance poetry."

"The children's engagement was phenomenal and staff enjoyed thinking creatively about not using pens or pencils for the day. Lots of outdoor and practical learning!"

"Observing students being challenged in their lessons in new and innovative ways. Also, receiving staff feedback about how it made them re-think their own teaching approaches."

"Listening to the children explaining why we need speaking and listening skills and how this helps in other areas of life and learning."

"Hearing the children talk normally which usually only happens on play ground duty. With the range of activities that was done in class it gave even the quietest child time to say what was on their mind."

The "buzz" around the school

"The buzz around the school was amazing, the children and staff were engaged and excited. It gave us the opportunity to put the brakes on for a minute and look around us, the teachers were able to plan creative and thought provoking activities using our local area as well. We are planning on doing a No Pens Day every term!"

"There was a real "buzz" around school. Every pupil was excited as soon as they saw the posters go up as they had enjoyed No Pens Day so much the previous year. Staff reported positive impacts and enjoyed the focus."

Workforce development

"We followed the normal timetable for the day and just did activities requiring no pens, this helped to show teaching staff that they don't always need to use pens and can do more with speaking and listening skills."



“The increased awareness and participation from staff and pupils; having access to your resources; support and coverage on social media. Increased awareness of SLCN.”

“Focusing on the importance of ‘talk’ as a learning tool. We as staff often tell children to ‘stop talking’ so this was an opportunity to discuss how important learning talk is.”

Feedback from teachers

“Many of the staff are carrying the concept on through the year to have a ring-fenced time for ‘no pens’ activities, so it has definitely increased awareness and given confidence to try new things.”

“Teachers remarked that children who are quite lethargic and unenthusiastic in lessons came alive on No Pens Day, therefore they are going to change the way they will be delivering their lessons.”

“It is wonderful to see new staff start with trepidation about how to teach for a whole day with no pens but then see them converted to the cause! The children take such joy in catching out any adults with a writing implement and even visitors to the school are warned to put them away. Above all, it was wonderful to see the children relax and participate in spoken language activities with such joy and relish.”

Opportunities for inclusion

“Gave an opportunity for children with different learning styles to have enrichment opportunities and gave staff a chance to think ‘outside the box’ when planning and delivery of lessons.”

“Seeing the children who struggle with reading and writing come into their element and shine.”

“The fact that the whole school could participate in a common project - we teach English to English children in France from age 4 to age 15 and wanted something that the whole school could do. For the older children, we used your BSL sign language link which was fantastic!”

“The enthusiastic engagement by those children who find written work more of a challenge. Rather than them withdrawing they were committed to all the activities knowing that there would be no writing (we advertised it throughout the school and with parents for some time beforehand).”





“Inclusion of all our pupils, using a variety of expressive communication such as signing, PECS and communication aids. Using role play and other drama activities to enhance communication skills.”

“The children loved the engaging activities it offered and it was a great leveller for pupils with varied communication abilities. Staff were really on board with it and it was an opportunity to reflect on lots of our practice around communication.”

Doing Something Different

“Accepting the challenge to not use pens in any situation during the day and then to see the children and their engagement in accepting new ways to learn.”

“This year we ran laughter classes during the day which also ran alongside the RCSLT Voicebox Competition. Both students and staff engaged fully in the classes.”

“We had children creating story maps in playdough, spelling games using letter cards, paper air plane competitions and superb art work. It gave the children more ownership too as they had to ‘prove’ their understanding using practical resources and speaking and listening in Maths. The staff enjoyed it and the children thought about the different ways they can learn. Planning on doing it again next year.”



The impact of the day

80% of survey respondents stated that taking part in No Pens Day Wednesday had raised awareness of speech, language and communication needs in their school. Furthermore, **19%** of respondents stated that as a result of taking part in the day, they had identified pupils who were struggling with their speech, language and communication development that they had not previously known about.

We have included a selection of some of the comments that we received below about how No Pens Day Wednesday has supported awareness raising and how the day has helped teachers to identify struggling pupils.



Raising Awareness:

“All pupils had the opportunity to engage in many varied speaking and listening activities across our wide broad and diverse curriculum. Staff are aware of the importance of communication and this is well planned for and embedded into our school ethos. Resources from yourselves support us to deliver this and look forward to our annual themed day.”

“It has improved all staff awareness of the importance of SLCN. Too often the expectations focus on a child’s written work and this shifted that day!”

“Staff are now more aware of the challenges that some students face when listening and communicating. They are also more aware of how they need to differentiate to ensure that students with SLCN are best supported.”

“No Pens Day Wednesday has been part of a larger drive to increase awareness of the need for oracy and SLCN, and has been accompanied by additional training, an oracy audit, change in school policy and resource sharing. There is a noticeable impact on the way staff are discussing pupils and lessons.”

“It has raised the importance of oral language and the need to embed it into all classroom activities. It also emphasised the fact that more students who don’t like reading and writing are able to experience success.”

“For children who struggle with literacy skills, it made a refreshing change to not feel the pressure of producing written work. They were able to communicate in a more confident way.”

“Helped children to see the importance of speech and language and how/why some people find it difficult. Highlighted any SLCN in the children that they weren’t aware of or weren’t aware of how difficult the children find speaking, listening and communicating.”

“Teachers were encouraged to embed speech, language and communication within their lessons rather than it being an ‘add-on’ service.”

“The focus is so strong on reading and writing at times that speech, language and communication can get lost. The day was a good way of reminding us that it’s not all about reading and writing! ”



Identifying Struggling Pupils:

“Teachers reported identifying children with issues speaking and listening difficulties who they haven’t identified before.”

“We found a couple of pupils who were new to the school, who struggled with communication.”

“We were able to get a list of pupils who would need extra help when doing these activities in the future.”

“Group discussion work is very challenging for some of our children. We knew this, but this added focus brought these struggles to the front of our minds. Word finding difficulties and both receptive and expressive difficulties were highlighted.”

“Some children found expressing their ideas verbally more challenging than was expected of them. It has made us consider their needs more closely.”

“Some students have been struggling to say a sentence, but have been hiding this behind poor behaviour or speaking in slang.”



No Pens Day Wednesday and changing practice

A very encouraging **96%** of survey respondents stated that they'd do something differently in their school or setting around speech, language and communication as a result of taking part in *No Pens Day Wednesday*. This figure really emphasises the fact that not only is the day having a significant impact in the short term, it is also having a long term effect on the way that schools think about speech, language and communication.

Below is a breakdown of the answers respondents selected most. A list of some of the comments made in response to 'other' is also provided.

Other:

“Staff (particularly those from the younger year groups) stated that they would regularly plan lessons with no writing - making this an emphasis at the introduction stage to the children - to encourage greater engagement.”

“We would like to run regular No Pens Days to allow children to develop more opportunities to develop their speaking and listening skills.”

“Every Wednesday morning we try and make our early bird work no pens.”

“Lots of staff said it had given them ideas about how to incorporate speaking into their lessons and how effective it is in helping students develop their understanding.”

“We will run two days of Talking Tuesday and No Writing Friday in the Spring and Summer term and will definitely do No Pens Wednesday again next year!”

“We already have a focus on spoken language but it was really nice to draw the children and parents attention to this.”

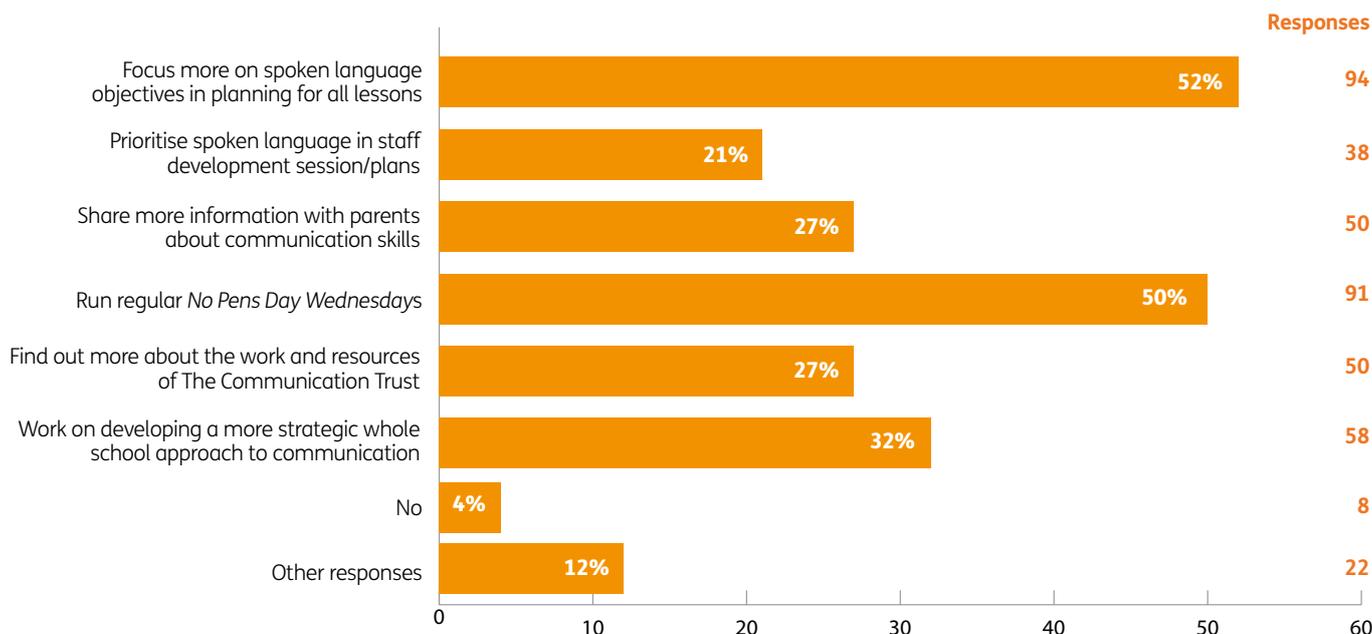


Table 5: Following on from *No Pens Day Wednesday*, will you do anything differently in school around speech, language and communication?

No Pens Day Wednesday 2017: Evaluation findings

The most popular action that schools said they would take was to 'focus more on spoken language objectives in planning for all lessons', with **52%** of respondents opting for this choice. As one of the primary aims of the day is to give speaking and listening more prominence within day to day lessons, it's very encouraging indeed to see the positive response that this action received. The option to 'run regular *No Pens Day Wednesdays*' was a close second, which was selected by **50%** of respondents, which highlights the large impact that teaching professionals perceive the day as having.

In addition to this, **55%** of respondents to the evaluation survey stated that they'd be interested in finding out more about/signing up for The Communication Commitment. This shows that *No Pens Day Wednesday* is increasing people's awareness of speech and language to the extent that they are looking into adopting a whole school approach to communication within their school, which is a very desirable result.



Media and web communications

Press Coverage

■ It was brilliant to see that 1 in 12 respondents received media coverage about their day, with many local newspapers choosing to report about *No Pens Day Wednesday*. Amongst others, *No Pens Day* was featured in the *Evening Express Chalk Talk*, the *Andover Advertiser*, the *Jersey Evening Post*, the *Lancashire Telegraph* and the *Teacher Toolkit* website.

Web hits

- *No Pens Day Wednesday* was the most popular page on our website in the week preceding the 4 October with **7,800** page views, more than three times any other page on our site.
- In addition to this, on 3 October, the day before *No Pens Day Wednesday*, our website received over **8,500** page views, the most we've received on a single day for the past 2 years!

Social media

- On the day itself we had record levels of social media interaction about the day.
- The **#nopensday** hashtag was used over 500 times, with an estimated reach of 500,000.
- When other hashtags such as **#nopensdaywednesday**, **#nopenswednesday** are added, this takes the total reach to over **750,000!**



Improvements

We're always looking to improve No Pens Day Wednesday year after year, and the fantastic feedback that we receive through our online survey is the key resource that allows us to do this. As with previous years, rather than giving respondents a set list of choices, we chose to provide a free text box to ensure that answers were as varied as possible.

Here are a selection of suggested improvements:

“We would love somebody from the Communication Trust to be able to visit our school.”

“Continue to share case studies and also share lessons and resources that other secondary schools have used.”

“Please please keep running it. Continuing to build of the wide range of resources for all pupils/age/schools and making them and sharing them easy will only encourage more schools to get on board.”

“Get a famous person to champion it so more generalised media attention.”

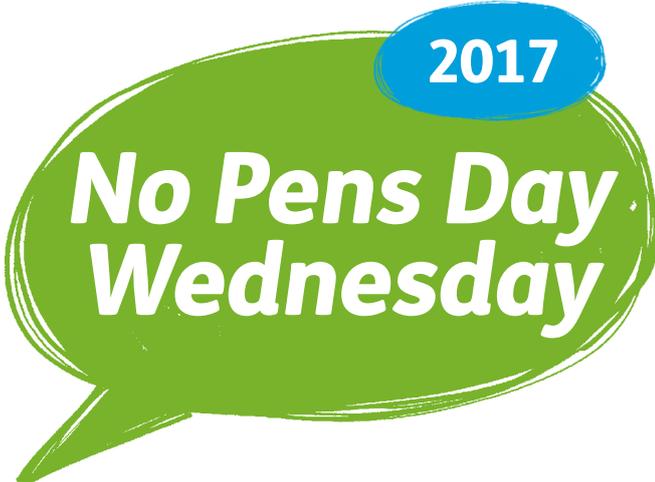
“Next year we would like to have a parent workshop where they could join in some of the activities.”

“Perhaps thinking of ways to promote this internationally.”





2017



No Pens Day Wednesday



If you have any questions about **No Pens Day Wednesday** or this evaluation please get in touch with **Jack Williams, Project Officer** at The Communication Trust on jwilliams@thecommunicationtrust.org.uk

You can find out more about **No Pens Day Wednesday**, access the free materials and run your day anytime.

Visit www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/nopensdaywednesday to find out more and sign up.



The Communication Trust
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