

Press release - For Immediate Release (30.05.2012)

DECODING PHONICS FOR CHILDREN WITH SLCN

Coalition releases guidance to support school staff administering June's Phonics Test

A new guide *Communicating Phonics* has been released today (Wednesday 30th May) by The Communication Trust, a consortium of nearly 50 voluntary organisations with expertise in speech, language and communication, to support teachers carrying out the Government's new phonics screening.

Aimed at Year 1, reception class teachers and SENCOs, *Communicating Phonics*, suggests ways in which children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) could be supported to access the phonics test. More than 1 million children in the UK have some form of SLCN that can affect them early, severely and for life – that's approximately two to three in every classroom.

SLCN is the most common childhood disability and the most common special educational need (SEN) identified by primary schools. It is a pan-disability issue; it is a feature of SEN such as hearing impairment, learning disabilities and autistic spectrum disorders.

Wendy Lee, Professional Director for The Communication Trust, says; "Language and literacy are flip sides of the same coin – one influences the other and therefore it is no surprise that children with SLCN are at high risk of literacy difficulties. We are concerned that children with SLCN could be negatively affected by the phonics test and without support find the experience upsetting and stressful.

"Our coalition harnesses the best expertise in supporting children with SLCN and we have used this to produce the *Communicating Phonics* guide. The phonics test, with careful interpretation, could help teachers identify particular difficulties and our guidance suggests approaches to support children to access phonics and wider literacy skills."

Lee continues, "The path to becoming a good reader is about more than just decoding print through phonics. Although we recognise it is an important part of learning to read, understanding what is being read and reading for pleasure are also key.

"The issue here is that phonics works best within a language-rich curriculum, where there is a rigorous and systematic approach to supporting speaking and listening skills. For children who are struggling to learn to read, approaches that have an emphasis on oral language skills, such as teaching vocabulary and language comprehension, can make a big difference to their progress."

Communicating Phonics includes:

- How to help children with SLCN access the test
- How children with different types of SLCN may respond to the test
- How to interpret and respond to their results
- Strategies to support children with SLCN to access phonics and wider literacy skills
- Where to go for information

It is available to download for free from www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/phonics alongside fact-sheets for professionals and parents / carers.

Symbol UK, providers of specialist speech and language therapy to children and adults with special needs, led on compiling *Communicating Phonics* with specialist input from the voluntary sector organisations that make up the Trust's Communication Consortium.

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Notes to editors

About the Phonics Screening

- The Phonics Checklist, also known as the Phonics Test or Phonics Screen, is being administered to Year 1 children (aged 5 - 6) from June 2012.
- The Department for Education has supplied universal guidance for administering the checklist and for interpreting and responding to the outcome.
- For more information, click here <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/assessment/keystage1/a00200415/year-1-phonics-screening-check-materials>

About The Communication Trust

- The Communication Trust is a coalition of nearly 50 leading voluntary sector and community based organisations.
- The Communication Trust is a campaigning voice for children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). It raises awareness, influences policy, promotes best practice among the children's workforce and commissions work from its members.
- It has an extensive advisory and partner network that includes the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT), Achievement for All, Council for Disabled Children, Early Support Programme and specialists across early years, schools and youth justice.
- Last year, the Trust ran the *Hello* campaign (national year of communication) in partnership with Jean Gross in her role as the Government's Communication Champion for children.

- Working with Pearson Assessment, the Trust developed *Universally Speaking*, a series of booklets for professionals that provides the 'ages and stages' of children's speech and language development from birth to 18 years old.
- For more information, visit www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk