

Press Release – For Immediate Release (Wed September 28th 2011)

MORE SCHOOLS GIVE UP PENS IN THE CLASSROOM TO PROMOTE LISTENING AND TALKING

More and more schools are taking part each day this month in *No Pens Day* - a national initiative when pupils give up their pens to focus on speaking and listening instead of writing. The event is being orchestrated by The Communication Trust as part of the *Hello* campaign (national year of communication).

Hundreds of schools across the country are taking part today (Wednesday 28th September 2011) in the event, which has never happened in education before. At least another 200,000 pupils at a further 400 schools are expected to outlaw pens for a day before the end of October.

Teachers at primary and secondary schools will be using lesson plans and activity templates developed by specialist teachers and speech and language therapists to conduct their lessons without pens. Classroom activities will include podcasting, maths games, debating, vocabulary games and 'talk' homework, all designed to highlight the importance of language for learning to pupils, parents, carers and school staff.

Staff at one primary school in Newark, Nottinghamshire dressed up as aliens and invaded the school during morning assembly and stole the pens from everyone there. At another primary school in Covent Garden, London, staff built a large time machine in the school yard, and Community Support Police Officers were involved to bring the event to life. At I CAN's Dawn House School, a specialist school in Rainworth for pupils with speech language and communication needs, pupils communicated using Makaton sign language.

To date, 500 primary schools, 100 secondary schools and 50 special schools have registered to take part in *No Pens Day*. In addition to this a hospital school, pupil referral unit and even a school in Indonesia will be taking part in the inaugural initiative.

Jean Gross, the Government's Communication Champion for children, said: "Not enough pupil talk goes on in Britain's classrooms – most of it is teacher talk. What little research has been done on this aspect of classroom behaviour suggests that the average length of a pupil's response to a teacher's question is just four words. We want to see more priority being given to speaking and listening skills, because they directly underpin the ability to read and write. Thanks to everyone taking part in *No Pens Day* for embedding speaking and listening even further into their teaching."

Anita Kerwin-Nye, Director of The Communication Trust, said; "For too long speech and language has existed in the shadow of reading and writing. As recent debates pose questions about what should teachers teach and children learn, we are calling on all schools to place an explicit and structured emphasis on speaking and listening approaches by taking part in *No Pens Day*. Our materials, lesson plans and resources give the children's workforce the tools and strategies needed to support speaking and listening and importantly to improve their confidence.

“A classroom filled with lots of talk can feel a challenge for teachers, but the benefits for pupils are far reaching. We recognise that teachers do not currently receive a great deal of training in this area and it is a skill set in its own right to weave speaking and listening into all aspects of a lesson. Historically, ensuring all pupils become ‘articulate’ hasn’t been a duty on schools, but the government’s new professional standards for teachers have changed this, and we want teachers to be ready.”

Schools taking part in *No Pens Day* are encouraged to give pupils opportunities to think by asking open questions, and to hold back on demonstrations or explanations until the ideas of pupils have been heard. Strategies include using the ‘10 second rule’ where teachers wait ten seconds after asking a question before prompting pupils for an answer, and giving pupils opportunities to test out their ideas with a ‘talk partner’ or in a group.

In the UK today, over 1 million children and young people have some form of speech, language and communication need (SLCN). *Hello* is the national year of communication – a campaign run by The Communication Trust and Communication Champion, Jean Gross, to make children and young people’s communication development a priority during 2011 and beyond.

Hello, sponsored by BT and Pearson Assessment, provides information on typical communication development, how to spot if children are struggling and where to go for help and support www.hello.org.uk

For more information

For more information on *No Pens Day* and to be in touch with schools in your area which are participating, please Laura Smith, Media and Campaigns Manager, at the Communication Trust on lsmith@thecomunicationtrust.org.uk or 020 7843 2519 / 07766651366. Pictures will also be available for use.

About No Pens Day and the *Hello* campaign

- *No Pens Day* is backed by Jean Gross, the government’s Communication Champion for children, and other curriculum experts including Sir Jim Rose, Professor Andrew Pollard, Professor Robin Alexander and Professor Mick Waters.
- *No Pens Day* is an initiative for the *Hello* campaign to tie into the September theme of ‘Back to School’.
- To launch the month, The Times Educational Supplement (TES) ran a special 8 page *Hello* supplement with support from BT and the Communication Champion. This featured a number of schools that have developed effective strategies to develop their pupils’ speech, language and communication skills. This can be viewed here <http://www.nxtbook.com/nxteu/tescreative/communicationtrust/>
- With the support of *Hello* sponsor Pearson Assessment, a range of *Universally Speaking* booklets have been developed for early years, primary (5-11) and secondary (11-18). These booklets are for anyone who works with children and young people and show where children should be with their communication skills at any given age. They help you find out if children are on track and what to do if you have concerns about any of their communication abilities. For more information, visit www.hello.org.uk/resources
- *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, a coalition of 40 leading voluntary sector organisations; 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 or to sign up for regular updates.

