Why make the Communication Commitment?

www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/commitment

What is the Communication Commitment?

The Communication Commitment is a simple way to develop a whole-school approach to communication. It recognises that all schools and pupils are different and helps you on the journey from your own school's starting point. It gives you support to make communication part of your school's policy and practice, in the way that works best for your school and pupils. The Commitment can help you shape your school offer in light of the SEND Reforms due to be implemented in September 2014.

How does the Communication Commitment work?

Through the Communication Commitment site, you will assess where you are already in five key priority areas. You will then be guided to choose five actions that best suit your school and the needs of your pupils. These will create your personalised Commitment Action Plan that you can print and share with your colleagues, pupils and wider school community.

We'll provide lots of free resources and guidance that will help you achieve these actions and you will also have the chance to share ideas with like-minded schools across England.

How long it takes to complete your Action Plan will depend very much on your school and the actions you choose. It might be that you already do some of your actions or you just need to tweak or formalise your practice. Or you might have chosen actions that are more of a stretch and you need to spend a bit more time planning how you can best achieve them. However long it takes, once you've completed your Action Plan you will get your Commitment Certificate and can plan a celebration of all you've achieved!

If when you've completed your Action Plan you'd like to take it further, we'll direct you to our expert member organisations who offer a range of support including training and consultancy services as well as full accreditation programmes, to help you build on what you've already achieved in Steps 1 and 2.

So why should our school make the Communication Commitment?

Four good reasons to start with...

1. Because communication drives learning and attainment and is embedded in a number of key education policies, including the Ofsted Framework.
2. Because strong language and communication skills are linked to better outcomes for children and young people in school and beyond.
3. Because understanding more about typical language development and communication across all phases will help you to better identify and support pupils with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), particularly in light of the SEND Reforms due to be implemented in September 2014.
4. Because your school will be part of a national initiative and you will get support from experts and a chance to share good practice.

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Below is further detail based on the overarching outcomes you will achieve for your pupils. The outcomes for each priority area of the action plan are also listed.

Because communication drives learning and attainment:

- The quality of spoken dialogue in primary classrooms can significantly improve children's educational attainment, from increasing SAT scores in Maths and Science, to improving reading comprehension, writing and reasoning skills.[1]
- In Ofsted's *Improving Literacy in Secondary Schools*, April 2013, speaking and listening was cited as a key factor in overall literacy attainment in secondary schools.
- 'Communication skills' are now part of the Ofsted inspection framework which evaluates how well pupils develop their communication skills, how well they apply them across the curriculum and how well teachers develop children's communication skills. There is also a clear focus on narrowing the attainment gap for disadvantaged pupils and those with SEN.
- The current Teacher Standards require teachers to 'demonstrate an understanding of and take responsibility for promoting high standards of articulacy', whatever subject they teach.

Because strong language and communication skills are linked to better outcomes for children and young people:

- Good spoken language and communication skills are strong predictors of reading, writing and later academic success.[2]
- For children who experience social deprivation, strong early spoken language has been shown to be the best indicator of those who can 'buck the trend' and escape poverty in adult life.[3]
- The evidence of impacts on outcomes for children who *don't* have strong language skills is equally clear. For example in 2011, 69.5% of pupils without (SEN achieved 5 or more A*-C GCSEs or equivalent, compared to only 12.9% of pupils with SLCN[4]. Research consistently shows that upwards of 60% of young people who offend have SLCN[5], which have often gone undetected.
- We have based the Communication Commitment on up to date academic evidence, including the Better Communication Research Programme[6], so our actions are both practical and grounded in current evidence, with outcomes for children and young people our priority.

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[1] Mercer, N. and Littleton, K. (2007) *Dialogue and the Development of Children's Thinking.* London: Routledge

[2] Gross, J. (2011) *The contribution of oral language skills to school improvement and outcomes for children and young people.* Office of the Communication Champion.

[3] Blanden, J. (2006) *'Bucking the trend': what enables those who are disadvantaged in childhood to succeed later in life?* Department for Work and Pensions.

[4] Department for Education. www.education.gov.uk/researchandstatistics/statistics/recentreleases/a00202462/gcse-equivalent-attainment-pupil-characteristics

[5] Bryan, K. Freer, J. and Furlong, C. (2007) *Language and communication difficulties in juvenile offenders..* International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders, Vol. 42, No. 5, Pages 505-520).

[6] Lindsay G. et al (2009-2012) *The Better Communication Research Programme* www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/cedar/better

Because understanding more about typical language development and communication will help you to better identify and support children with SLCN:

- Many children are not developing language and communication skills as expected: at the end of the Foundation Stage, more than a third of children are not yet working securely in communication, language and literacy, rising to more than 40% in areas of social disadvantage.[7]
- Although SLCN are common, many children and young people's needs are missed; this can happen even in highly committed teams who don't have easy access to information on the ages and stages of typical language development.[8]
- Understanding language development is not a consistently strong focus within initial teacher training and a recent Ofsted report recommended that training should ensure that all primary trainees understand the development of language skills from the early years to year 6.[9]
- Despite prevalence figures of at least 5%, fewer than 1% of pupils with SLCN are being entered for GCSEs.

Because your school will part of a national initiative and you will get support from experts and a chance to share good practice:

- The Communication Commitment has been developed as a partnership between national experts and busy school professionals like you, who know how things work on the ground.
- The Commitment is designed to be a user-friendly resource to support you on your journey to improving communication and is full of useful tips, toolkits and resources.
- The Commitment takes a systematic and holistic approach to considering communication, but is also flexible to suit the needs of individual schools.
- By telling us what has worked well in your school, you will be helping us to build the resource for other schools to start their journey too.

Find out more at **www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/commitment**

You may also find our recent thinkpiece useful - ***A Generation Adrift****: the case for speech, language and communication to take a central role in schools policy and practice:*
www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/agenerationadrift

7 Ofsted report 2012
[8] Lee, W. (2013) *Talk of the Town evaluation report.* The Communication Trust.
[9] Ofsted (2012): *From training to teaching early language and literacy: The Effectiveness of training to teach language and literacy in primary schools*

Outcomes and principles for the Action Plan priority areas

The Communication Commitment website will help you decide on an Action Plan to enable you to put communication at the heart of your school. This Action Plan will be personalised to your school's needs and is based around the following priority areas:

- **1. School leadership**
- **2. Workforce development**
- **3. Communication - friendly schools**
- **4. Supporting pupils with SLCN**
- **5. Engagement with parents, families or employers**

Below you will find information on the aims, outcomes and principles for each priority area.

Priority area one: School Leadership

Why is this priority area important?
We all know that leadership influences everything in school. By ensuring the commitment to communication is driven from the leadership team, we will ensure policy and practice cascade throughout the school and to the wider community.
What is the overall outcome for this area?
Our school leaders are making a commitment to communication**.**
What are the principles we are trying to achieve?

- Our school leadership team understand that communication is important.
- Our school leadership team know that there are strategies to support communication.
- Our school leadership team is committed to policy and practice within our school that reflects the importance of communication.

Priority area two: Workforce development

Why is this priority area important?
Staff are the greatest resource in any school. We know many teachers don't feel confident in supporting communication, particularly when pupils are struggling. There is evidence from research and practice reporting positive outcomes when teachers are able to weave speaking and listening into their day to day practice. By providing professional development, supporting greater knowledge and development of skills, staff can be supported to enable pupils to communicate to the very best of their ability.
What is the overall outcome for this area?
Our staff are making a commitment to communication.
What are the principles we are trying to achieve?

- Our staff are aware of the importance of speech, language and communication.
- Our staff are building their understanding of speech, language and communication.
- Our staff are developing their practice in supporting speech, language and communication.

Priority area three: Communication - Friendly schools

Why is this priority area important?

Creating a communication friendly environment for pupils in our schools encourages the development of good communication skills in all pupils and creates a more inclusive environment for those who struggle. This is best done by the way we talk as adults, through the opportunities we give pupils to communicate and by the physical environment we work within.

What is the overall outcome for this area?

Our school is working at being communication friendly.

What are the principles we are trying to achieve?

- We give each other time to communicate.
- We all have opportunities to communicate in our school.
- We want all our pupils to be able to communicate to the best of their ability.

Priority area four: Supporting pupils with SLCN

Why is this priority area important?

It can be difficult to spot children and young people's speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) and teachers report they are often not too confident in knowing how best to support these pupils. Often we can see poor literacy skills or difficulties with aspects of learning, or even poor behaviour, though it can be poor language that is the foundation of these difficulties. We know a lot about how to support SLCN; the new ***What Works*** database can help practitioners find the right evidence-based interventions and specialists can advise on the most appropriate strategies. Pupils themselves tell us that what makes a huge difference to them is when the adults around them understand the nature of their difficulties.

What is the overall outcome for this area?

We want to make things better for children who are struggling.

What are the principles we are trying to achieve?

- We're all watching out for children with SLCN.
- We're checking out what we are doing already for pupils with SLCN.
- We're working towards best ways to support pupils with SLCN.

Priority area five: Engagement with parents, families and employers

Why is this priority area important?

We know from research how important parental engagement is for children and young people's school life. Schools are often the centre of the community, with local employers as key partners. Families and employers often value good communication skills as being important for the prospects for children and young people whilst in school and beyond. Though, to ensure that we are addressing communication effectively for our pupils, we need to address it together in order to get the best results.

What is the overall outcome for this area?

We're telling our community about communication.

What are the principles we are trying to achieve?

- Our community knows communication is important to us.
- We're asking our community to get involved.
- We're finding out what our community thinks.