

Letter from the #LetsTalkCommunication coalition

Sent via email - please reply to: peter.just@rcslt.org

The Rt Hon Sir Keir Starmer MP
The House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

6 February 2024

Dear Sir Keir,

As we approach the general election, we wanted to take this opportunity to write to you about the importance of spoken language and communication in children and young people's development and therefore their whole life. We know the importance you attach to this and have been pleased to see your pledges on early speech and language support.

We are a coalition of over 50 organisations dedicated to improving the lives of children and young people, including through supporting, developing, and promoting their spoken language and communication. We have co-authored the attached brief that we hope you will consider while drafting your manifesto.

We believe that the party who is looking to form the next government must address the fact that children and young people are now more likely than ever to have spoken language and communication challenges, and even greater problems getting the help they need to address these issues. The facts are that:

- **one in ten** children have a long-term speech, language and communication need.
- **1.9 million** children and young people are struggling with talking and understanding words.
- as many as **50% of children in areas of social disadvantage** start school with language difficulties.
- **7% of all children** have a lifelong condition called Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) which reduces their ability to understand and express language.

But there are solutions that we wanted to share with you. Building on your pledges to date, we think spoken language and communication could be strengthened by your manifesto including pledges on:

- Recognising that spoken language and communication is at the heart of developing and improving literacy and numeracy, as well as fundamental to children's emotional development and mental health;
- Building on efforts to develop all children's language and communication in the Early Years by a sustained focus on spoken language and communication across all ages and stages of education;
- Ensuring children and young people with long-term speech and language challenges receive the support they need, including identifying those difficulties in the first instance, and timely access to speech and language therapy where required;
- Supporting teachers and schools to develop their students' spoken language and communication, and embed spoken language and communication requirements through high quality guidance, training and resources;
- Additional targeted support to address the ongoing impact of the pandemic on children's speech, language and communication development.

If, as a country, we don't address these problems, many children and young people will not be able to live up to their potential. Children and young people and their families need all parties to promise to include these policies in their manifestos, so that whoever forms the next government, children and young people will start getting the support they need.

Yours sincerely,

Ace Centre, Bob Birchall, Chief Executive

Action Cerebral Palsy, Pilar Cloud, Chief Executive

Action for Stammering Children, Ria Bernard, Chief Executive

ADHD Foundation - The Neurodiversity Charity, Dr Tony Lloyd, Chief Executive

Afasic, Linda Lascelles, Chief Executive

Ambitious about Autism, Jolanta Lasota, Chief Executive

ASLTIP, Sarah Buckley, Chair

Association of YOT Managers, Jacqui Belfield-Smith and Diz Minnitt, Chair and SEND and Speech and Language Lead

Auditory Verbal UK, Anita Grover, Chief Executive

Autistica, Dr James Cusack, Chief Executive

BACCH, Professor Doug Simkiss, Chair

BACD, Dr Catherine Tuffrey, Chair

BACP, Dr Phil James, CEO

BATOD, Sue Denny, President

Better Communication CIC, Marie Gascoigne, Director

BASW, Julia Ross, Chair

British Dyslexia Association, Chivonne Preston, CEO

British Psychological Society, Sarb Bajwa, Chief Executive

Cochlear Implanted Children's Support Group, Tricia Kemp, Group Coordinator
Different Strokes, Austin Willett, CEO
Dingley's Promise, Catherine McLeod MBE, Chief Executive
Disabled Children's Partnership, Stephen Kingdom, Campaign Manager
Down's Syndrome Association, Carol Boys, Chief Executive
Elklan, Henrietta McLachlan, Director
Embracing Complexity Coalition, Dr James Cusack, Chair
Headlines Craniofacial Support, Karen Wilkinson-Bell, Director
Intermediaries for Justice, Catherine O'Neill, Chair
Kids, Katie Ghose, CEO
N-ABLES, Dr Emily Bennett, Chair
NAPLIC, Stephen Parsons, Chair
NASS, Claire Dorer OBE, Chief Executive Officer
NASUWT - The Teachers' Union, Dr Patrick Roach, General Secretary
NatSIP, Rory McDonnell and Caireen Sutherland, Co-Chairs
NDTi, Bill Love, Executive Director
Pace, Rich Wiltshire, Chief Executive
pdnet, Di Caesar, Chief Executive
RCSLT, Steve Jamieson MSc BSc (Hons) RN
SAPHNA, Sharon White OBE, CEO
sen.se, Julie Walker, Executive Officer
Signalong, Tracy Goode, CEO
SMiRA, Shirley Landrock-White, Chair
Speaking Citizens, Tom Wright, Reader in Rhetoric and Principal Investigator
Special Needs Jungle, Tania Tirraoro, Co-director
Speech & Language Link, Pete McLeod, Director
Speech and Language UK, Jane Harris, Chief Executive
Speech Bubbles, Elizabeth Kennedy, General Manager
SPTS, Julie Walker, Lead
STAMMA, Catherine Woolley, Children and Families Programme Lead
Symbol, Debbie Honeysett, Operational Manager (East)
Talking Mats, Margo Mackay, Director
The Elizabeth Foundation, Julie Hughes, Chief Executive
The National Organisation for FASD, Sandra Butcher, Chief Executive
Voice 21, Dr Kate Paradine, Chief Executive

cc: Bridget Phillipson MP

enc: 'Opportunity for all: maximising spoken language and communication' brief