

What to do… Hands up for silence

What is ‘hands up for silence’?

Gaining collective silence in an efficient and consistent way is important to the success of so many different types of transitions throughout the academy day: whether this is facilitating a move to line-up at the start of a day or a transition to take whole-class feedback within a lesson. Being able to gain student silence is not about controlling students, it is about being able to move throughout the different parts of a school day with purpose by making sure that whatever comes after the transition has everyone’s full attention. Having a consistent and highly visible signal for silence which is used by all staff throughout the academy provides absolute clarity about what behaviour is expected no matter who is completing this signal. When a member of staff needs to gain silence, they raise their hand straight into the air and wait for silence from students (and staff). In Secondaries, students do not raise their hands; they simply finish what they are doing and immediately fall silent. Staff and students do not continue to finish conversations when hands are raised – the signal for silence means that everyone is silent, now.

What makes an effective hands up for silence?

Student & staff practice

Although the signal of ‘hands up for silence’ is simple, like all routines, staff and students need to understand its purpose and have dedicated time to practise it. The routine needs to be practised and modelled to staff and students. Practice scenarios for staff and students need to include how to use and respond to hands up for silence both in lessons and in collective spaces.

Consistent times for hands up for silence for collective times

When ‘hands up for silence’ is being used to support collective transitions such as morning line-up or the end of a break time, ensure that this is done at the exact time each day so that students know to expect the routine to start at the same time each day. This consistency create clarity and also reassurance for students to know what to expect.

Confident hands up

When staff put their hand up for silence they need to do so with confidence. This means their arm should go straight up into the air and their body language should be assertive and confident. Staff should also position themselves in the space where they can be seen looking, so that students know the member of staff is actively checking that they are falling silent.

Whilst your hand is up

Hands up for silence means that everyone is silent. As staff, we need to ensure we role model this. This means that when we raise our hands we do not carry on a conversation with a student or member of staff and if we need to continue the conversation, we take the conversation into a different space. In addition, to ensure that students have the best chance of seeing you with a raised hand, move with purpose whilst your hand is up. This particularly supports students in larger collective spaces.

Staff working as a team

If you are using hands up for silence in a larger collective space, staff need to be spread out across the space to ensure maximum coverage. This will ensure that more students see the signal and that they respond quickly. If possible, the lead member of staff should make eye contact with these staff around the room to indicate that hands up is about to take place.

No countdown

Do not use a count down before using hands up for silence as this de-values the signal for silence and students will come to equate silence with the countdown. Instead, you might narrate to expect hands up for silence when you give instructions about a task, so that students are ready and expecting the signal. Of course, if you are managing a transition where students are already in silence, this is different, as you would not need to use the hands up for silence and a countdown at this point might be a strategy you decide to use.

Practical subjects

Hands up for silence may need to be preceded by another signal if the space you are managing is very large, like and field for a PE lesson, or if students are operating noisy machinery such as in a DT lesson. In this situation, the signal should be consistent across the department and should be practised with students so that they know why there is a difference and what to do.