



# Brookfields School Communication Policy

## **INTRODUCTION**

Brookfields school promotes a 'total communication' approach to the teaching and learning of language and communication in the school's curriculum. This policy covers a wide range of modes of communication including spoken language alongside the use of augmentative and alternate communication devices (AAC / LAMP), picture exchange communication symbols (PECS) and sign language (Makaton/BSL).

The school recognises that language and communication underpins the whole curriculum. This is particularly relevant in the social exchange of requesting, expressing needs and sharing knowledge, skills and understanding. As such, it is at the core of our curriculum and the importance of communication in empowering pupils to function within society and enabling their access to learning and knowledge.

We aim to create a 'communication-enabling environment' in which children can learn, play and develop skills alongside others while taking part in everyday social and educational activities.

## **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **Communication lead:**

- The communication subject leader has responsibility for the implementation of this policy. The communication subject leader is also the literacy subject leader.
- The Subject Leader will attend relevant courses within the field of communication and language development and support and advise other staff members.
- Communication is regarded as an integral part of pupils' educational provision and requires a multi-agency approach for its successful administration. The subject leader holds termly multi-agency link meetings to discuss the development plans for all pupils in school requiring additional speech and language support.
- The subject leader ensures the overseeing of care plans for the pupils in school and supports teaching teams with their implementation where required.
- The subject leader ensures that communication and language is subject to the school's standard monitoring and evaluation procedures.
- The school maintains a continual professional development programme for teaching and support staff. There will be in-house training for all staff and newly appointed staff as part of their induction and for professional development



### **Employees:**

- All staff follow this policy to ensure a total communication approach to teaching and learning.
- Teaching staff implement objectives and activities outlined in pupil care plans.
- Teaching staff refer pupils to SALT for additional support or strategies once care plan objectives are achieved or for any new concerns for pupils.
- All staff use communication support devices (PECS / PODD / LAMP / AAC) within a cross curricular learning approach across the school day.

### **OBJECTIVES**

- To encourage full and rich language development commensurate with every child's capabilities.
- To provide specialist teaching that is appropriate for individual pupils' needs.
- To use a variety of programmes, systems and strategies that will aid and enhance communication and language that is appropriate for individual pupils or groups of pupils such as those on the autistic spectrum.
- To facilitate a 'total communication' environment using spoken language and, whenever necessary, appropriate AAC devices, to facilitate effective communication.
- To value all forms of communication and give pupils opportunities to develop their skills to their potential.
- To maintain a secure and stimulating environment which encourages pupils to communicate.
- To enable the all pathways within the school curriculum to be delivered through a language and communication system that supports pupils' age, level of ability and learning style
- To maintain a team work approach to communication to promote communication based IEPs with teaching teams, the language and communication leader and with the school leadership team
- To work in partnership with parents/carers to deliver language and communication programmes common to the home and school environment. Thus respectfully maintaining a multi-agency environment in which all professionals share the same expectation, target and method over pupils' communication promoting a common approach across a range of environments.

### **AUGMENTATIVE AND ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION [AAC]**

AAC is an umbrella term that encompasses the communication methods used to supplement or replace speech or writing for those with impairments in the production or comprehension of spoken or written language. AAC includes simple systems that are presented in the following forms:



- **No-tech** communication does not involve any additional equipment i.e. body language, gestures, pointing, eye pointing, facial expressions, vocalisations, signing (Makaton / BSL).
- **Low-tech communication systems** do not need a battery to function and include: pen and paper to write messages or draw; alphabet and word boards; communication charts or books with pictures (PECS), photos and symbols and objects of reference. This is sometimes referred to as 'aided communication' because additional equipment is required.
- **High-tech communication systems** need power from a battery or mains. Most of them speak and/or produce text. They range from simple buttons or pages that speak when touched, to very sophisticated systems. Some high-tech communication systems are based on familiar equipment such as mobile devices, tablets and laptops, others use equipment specially designed to support communication. This is sometimes referred to as 'aided communication' because additional equipment is required.

AAC forms currently used within Brookfields School include:

### ***PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System)***

*PECS* is based on highly structured intervention strategies to develop pupils' communication and social interaction skills. The focus is for pupils to have functional communication skills in which they initiate interaction and to maintain exchanges with familiar adults and peers.

The system consists of six phases, from the initial exchange [Phase 1] to travelling to initiate interaction [Phase 2] to discriminating symbols [Phase 3] to using sentence strips to request including the application of attributes [Phase 4] and then to comment and to ask questions [Phases 5 and 6].

Pupils are taught to initiate communicative activities for concrete outcomes in familiar social contexts. Staff identify an individual pupil's motivator or reinforcer to ensure his/her access to the *PECS* programme. Pupils with minimal or no spoken language, use *PECS* to effectively communicate their needs, wants and to make choices. *PECS* is predominantly presented using physical symbols with a small number of pupils using a computer aided version of Proloquo-to-go presented on an iPad.

### **Makaton / British Sign Language**

This signing system is used for pupils who have limited or reduced clear word utterances. It provides a means to enhance pupil's expressive communication skills as well assisting their comprehension skills. *Makaton* can be used with symbols as part of a 'total communication' approach and is suitable for pupils with additional disabilities such as those on the autistic spectrum.



*Makaton* is structured on nine stages that accord to level of difficulty. The signing system is based on *British Sign Language*. It is practice for selected key words to be signed and are always accompanied by their verbal representation. Signing is used through highly motivating social contexts such as singing or snack requests and to name objects or images used to support curriculum learning.

The long term aim is to fade out the sign system when the pupils' verbal communication skills have progressed and are effective within social settings.

### **Language Acquisition through Motor Planning (LAMP)**

LAMP is a therapeutic approach based on neurological and motor learning principles. The goal similar to other communication methods, such as PECS, is to give individuals who are nonverbal or have limited verbal abilities a method of independently and spontaneously expressing themselves in any setting.

LAMP focuses on giving the individual independent access to vocabulary on voice output AAC device that use consistent motor plans for accessing vocabulary. Teaching of the vocabulary happens across environments, with multisensory input to enhance meaning, with the child's interests and desires determining the vocabulary to be taught.

Pupils that are deemed suitable to LAMP are assessed and trailed with the devices through NHS SALT team and then funding methods are put in place to purchase a suitable device. LAMP is available on class Ipads to be used within the classroom for identified pupils.

### **PODD (or Pragmatic Organisation Dynamic Display) communication books**

The PODD communication system is taught through a focus on natural language stimulation, where visual language is modelled alongside verbal. The adult language partner points to the symbols representing the key words of the sentence whilst speaking.

The children therefore see picture symbols used for an entire range of functions by capable communication partners, and in doing so learn how to use this communication method within natural settings.

The pupils are supported and encouraged to point to the symbols that they wish to use to communicate.

### **Go Talk**

Go Talks are battery powered AAC devices where an adult or verbal speaking peer can record words or phrases. An overlay of pictures (or words or symbols) is created. The pictures help the user remember where to find messages. The overlay is slid into the Go Talk, and then the user can "talk" simply by pressing on a picture to play a message. This



allows users to communicate quickly and easily just by pressing a button.

## **METHODS TO SUPPORT EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION**

### **Reduced Language**

Receptive language is an area where some of the pupils show a range of difficulties. This is due to many factors including pupils' developmental condition. However, pupils' deficits in their receptive skills are also due to contextual or situational factors. One major factor results from adults using too many words, speaking too quickly, or giving directions containing too many elements. By ascertaining pupils' range and level of comprehension, staff accordingly adjust their communication using reduced language that is focused on key words. This maximises pupils' opportunity to attend and comprehend the core message of a verbal exchange.

### **Intensive Interaction**

Intensive interaction forms one of many strategies that are used to promote basic communication skills. The approach is non-confrontational and uses pupils' existing behaviour repertoire and reactive responses to stimuli and to intervention. A fundamental objective is to establish a two way exchange of gesture, movement or facial expression.

It is highly suitable for pupils with profound communication disabilities and is based on the establishment of interactive exchanges between pupils and staff.

Through modelling strategies that are intrinsically enjoyable to the pupils intensive interaction is effective at the very basic level of communication. It needs to be regularly administered so that pupils are familiar with the activities and respond to staff expectation. Pupils' prior learning forms the basis for developing incremental tasks to extend their communication skills and their social interaction.

### **Use of Social and Joint Attention Routines**

For ASD pupils, the school addresses the triad of impairment by employing social and joint attention routines. An important element of the routines is to allow time for the pupils to process language, verbal, gestural and symbolic. Social routines for young pupils involve activities such as 'nursery rhymes' where two way interaction takes place, pupils take turn, show anticipation and may make a request to continue, for example. Joint routines centre on toys or objects whereby staff and pupils undertake joint activities, including turn taking that facilitate social interaction. The focus is on developing a repertoire of routines that are intrinsically enjoyable to pupils and support their verbal and non-verbal communication skills through their interactions. The relationship between pupils and staff forms the basis on which pupils' learning is assisted and developed across the curriculum and throughout the school.

### **Music Therapy**

The aim of music therapy is to engage each pupil in the process of interaction and to build up a desire to communicate. This approach is based on staff – pupil interaction and focuses



on what the pupil can do. In this way it shares the same root as intensive interaction but with the additional factor of music to facilitate and reinforce communication and the child's role in the process. A part time music therapist is deployed to work with designated pupils both on an individual basis and in small groups.

### **Social Stories**

Social stories are used with ASD pupils to address some aspects of their disabilities relating to social interaction e.g. if they have difficulties in assuming the perspective of another person. A Social Story provides the opportunity for pupils to 'read' and understand situations. It provides the context in which pupil gain an understanding of 'who,' 'what', 'when', 'where' and 'why' elements in social settings.

Designated ASD pupils have personalised social stories that address their specific social interaction needs. A wide range of settings are covered, for example, guiding pupils to deal appropriately with frustration or reinforcing ways to maintain particular activities.

### **Communication Passports**

Communication passports are used to overcome the barriers to communication that arise during pupils' transition between classes and between settings. A multi-agency approach is used to formulate a communication passport in which parent/carers have a key role. In the main, key issues are dealt with, for example, how to communicate effectively with a pupil, things that pupils' like or dislike or details about their home settings. The key factor is to maintain an agreed communication system for pupils that is flexible and easily used across different settings, including the home.

### **Communication targets**

All pupils have an individualised Communication plan encompassing a SCERTS approach and these are readily available within each classroom. The pupils are identified as language or social partners and these plans include key word levels and BLANK levels for development of questioning techniques.

### **TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and Communication related handicapped Children)**

TEACCH is used to establish a highly structured learning environment in which visual presentations are maximised and are accompanied by minimal verbal instruction. This is achieved by adapting aspects of the environment such as its physical structure, pupils' work systems and enhancing the visual presentation of tasks and activities. The specialist teaching strategies employed promote pupils' understanding of their surroundings, support their comprehension and improve their awareness of what is expected of them. Consistent and regular presentation of tasks and methods of communication are essential for sustained improvement in overall skills.



An adaptation of the *TEACCH* programme is in place for those pupils who require this approach. This approach helps children and young people to make sense of their surroundings and what is expected of them. This has been found to have the effect of reducing frustration and anxiety thereby improving both behaviour and communication.

## **SPELL**

The *SPELL* approach recognises that structure, consistency, reduction of disturbing stimuli and a high degree of organisation offer the optimum environment for learning and for ease of communication to take place. *SPELL* stands for:

**Structure**-by giving the day a recognised structure the child feels more secure.

**Positive**-positive approaches and expectations enhance pupil self-confidence and esteem.

**Empathy**- differentiated programmes that recognises the pupil's individual need.

**Low arousal** settings, the child is not distracted or made over anxious by the environment.

**Links** with parents, schools, other agencies and the wider community.

## **CURRICULUM**

Language, Communication and Literacy are delivered through the Early Years Foundation Stage and through both pathways – explorers and adventurers.

Language and communication is covered across all areas of the curriculum, regardless of pupil pathway, through a cross curricular approach. The school adheres to equal opportunity for all pupils to access the language and communication curriculum through differentiated strategies based on their individual needs.

Language and communication training is given as required on the breakdown on expressive and receptive communication approaches.

As part of the national and early years curriculum guidelines pupils are encouraged through daily systematic phonic games and activities to hear and discriminate general sounds, speech sounds and patterns. Speech sound discrimination is encouraged through activities involving rhythm and rhyme and alliteration until the pupil can isolate the initial phoneme in a word. The pupil may then move on from hearing and saying to identifying phonemes and spelling and recognising letters and reading.

## **EXTERNAL LINKS**

At Brookfields School, we will encourage links with other Complex Learning Difficulties Schools and continue links and training programmes with mainstream primary schools to support Inclusive education.



Links will continue to be developed for training of other agencies that support Brookfields pupils e.g. Midday assistants, social Services [Respite Facilities] and transport guides.

The school maintains a highly integrated approach to the delivery of communication and language programmes. Information is drawn from a variety of professionals, to inform the assessment and identification of priorities for individual communication programmes. The school liaises with professionals that have links with communication outcomes and cause and effect of difficulties, these professionals include the speech and language therapists [Chatterbugs and Jane Mullen], educational psychologists, the Positive Behaviour Support Team and the Occupational Therapist.

The speech and language therapists that work within the school include Halton commissioned Chatterbugs and a school commissioned support, Jude from Jane Mullen. Jude works with those pupils who the school identifies as having a group or individual need for additional support. The subject lead liaises with all of these professionals to maintain an overview of input and as part of this holds termly professionals meetings.

Information received from parent/ carers at admission or termly parents meetings may also be used to contribute to the pupil's communication and language programme.

### **ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES**

For pupils on admission, assessment in major areas of development is undertaken through tools such as *B Squared* assessment which is used to track pupil progress throughout their school life as well as set individual, group and whole school targets and Boxall profile looking at the social and emotional needs of the individual pupils.

Communication outcomes are discussed at termly pupil progress meetings with the assessment lead and any concerns are raised to the communication lead.

Any identified speech and language needs require a referral to Chatterbugs speech and language department for initial assessment and the allocation of the correct course of therapy. This is undertaken by the class teacher in liaison with parents.

### **PARENT TRAINING**

For parents of children who use PECS a "symbols workshop" is run annually aimed at giving parents an overview of the programme. This is run jointly with the Speech and Language Therapist. Parents work with the Speech and Language Therapist at home and 1:1 with staff in school.

Across the school year a range of training events are run in school, often linked to the monthly coffee morning that is held. These cover a wide range of topics and are run by external professionals. Feedback from parents helps the school choose topics to be focussed upon.



The school has staff members who are registered providers of the National Autistic Society's *EarlyBird* parent programme. This programme is offered to all parents of pupils with an ASD diagnosis or related condition [Retts/ Fragile X/ Obsessive Compulsive Disorder OCD]. The programme is also offered to a professional working with the family i.e. social services key worker. The programme looks in detail at autism, communication and behaviour. The section on communication covers language levels and how communication develops through the seven stages. The programme explains the difficulties autistic children have in developing communication and language and the strategies that can be implemented to address this in the home setting.

The Triple P parenting support programme is signposted to parents. Parents can request the course or are identified at CAFs, Annual reviews or via staff. Its aim is:

- To create a stable, supportive, happy family environment
- Teach their children the skills they need to get along with others
- Deal positively, consistently and decisively with problem behaviour
- Encourage positive behaviour
- Develop realistic expectations of their children and themselves
- Take care of themselves as parents

### **Dissemination of Policy**

The school and Academy Councillors should ensure that they have knowledge of the policy and its implications for the school. It is the responsibility of the subject co-ordinator to inform the Head teacher and the Academy Councillors of any amendments. A range of strategies will evaluate the success of this policy:

- Evidence of a continuum for Early Years to Key Stage Two provision.
- Evidence of a balanced and appropriate communication rich curriculum being delivered both discretely and through cross curricular implementation.
- Evidence that there is a range of teaching and learning styles evident in the planning and implementation of the teaching of communication.
- Evidence that the pupils have high self-esteem and feel valued.
- Evidence that staff confidence and expertise is increasing through continued Professional Development.
- Evidence that the pupil have access to a method in which they can spontaneously communicate with others.

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**Michelle O'Connor.**

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