

FOX WOOD SCHOOL

TOTAL COMMUNICATION POLICY

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Signed:

Philosophy

Communication occurs all the time, throughout every aspect of school and home life. It is a basic human right. It is the way that we make friends and build relationships, express our needs and feelings, make choices, learn and achieve independence. For children and young people, communication is integral to healthy development. When considering the Every Child Matters framework, children and young people will only be able to achieve the identified outcomes of being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well-being, if their communication needs are fully met and supported.

The development of appropriate communication skills is therefore a priority for the pupils at Fox Wood School, as a means of accessing the curriculum and participating in everyday life experiences.

This policy outlines the aims, principles and strategies for the development of communication skills at Fox Wood School. It reflects the consensus of opinion of the whole teaching staff and has the full agreement of the governing body. We believe that all children and young people have the right to understand and be understood in all aspects of life.

What is Total Communication?

“Total Communication” describes an approach that seeks to create a supportive means of communication to understand and be understood’ (Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists). This means that pupils and staff are encouraged to use every available form of communication, with a particular emphasis on what is relevant to individuals. A Total Communication approach acknowledges that communication is not simply about talking and emphasises the importance of body language, gesture, photos, symbols, signs, objects and more creative mediums such as music and art.

Total Communication is important for children and young people who may have difficulty speaking, reading, writing and understanding spoken words and it also supports the learning and understanding of all children and young people by presenting information in a variety of ways.

Aims

Our aims in teaching communication skills are that all pupils including those with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) will:

- ☐ develop the necessary skills to communicate effectively, appropriately and confidently to the best of their ability. This includes the use of body movements, (e.g. whole body movements, eye gaze, facial expressions, or pointing), the use of objects of reference, on body signing, Intensive Interaction, Makaton signs, photos, picture communication symbols, PECS books, symbol books and charts, communication software, a wide variety of communication aids, vocalisation, and speech.
- ☐ develop the ability to listen, to understand, and to respond, at their level.

- ☐ have access to Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) aids, appropriate to the needs of individual pupils, including Makaton signing, Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), and electronic communication aids, such as iPads.
- ☐ have their AAC and its implications included in their Individual Education Plan (IEP) targets.
- ☐ be supported outside school to ensure continuity.
- ☐ be provided with structured opportunities to develop spontaneous language
- ☐ where appropriate take part in Intensive Interaction sessions.

For further information about PECS/AAC, Intensive Interaction and on-body signing please see Appendices

Teaching and Learning Styles

The teaching of communication skills takes place throughout the school day, and is addressed in all lessons, in particular, but not only, the Speaking and Listening element of the English curriculum. Communication skills can be developed through individual, paired, group or whole class activities. Pupils will be encouraged to communicate with each other through working collaboratively and sharing their work and experiences as appropriate. This communication may be verbal, using signs, symbols, photos or electronic communication aids.

Teaching staff use non-verbal communication such as symbols, signing and gesture as appropriate, to aid pupil understanding. Speech is used at a level appropriate to individual understanding, ranging from the use of 1 or 2 key words to phrases and sentences.

Teaching and learning takes place in a variety of settings, including educational visits, snack and lunch times, play activities, and activities in the multisensory room. During whole school activities, e.g. assembly, Makaton signing, photos and symbols are used to support communication. Symbols and communication aids are also used as part of displays in corridors and classrooms. Consideration is given to not use displays in areas of classrooms where they may be a distraction to pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Additional input in communication skills is provided by five Teaching Assistants who have had specialist training provided by Speech and Language Therapists.

Speech and Language Therapy (SALT)

The Speech and Language Therapists work on a consultative basis in conjunction with the Speech and Language Therapy Assistant, school staff, and parents. Assessment may involve observation in the classroom, individual assessments, or home visits.

Following assessment, SALT provide treatment plans which are carried out throughout the day by school staff and parents/carers. A pupil may also receive group or individual direct therapy sessions with an assistant. General advice is also given to staff regarding the

development of pupils' communication skills and whole staff training is provided as required.

Provision for Pupils following the Foundation Stage Framework

Pupils will follow the characteristics of Effective Learning outlined in 'Development Matters in the Early Years Foundation Stage' (2012). Pupils will follow the Prime and Specific Areas of Learning and Development which includes Communication and Language as a Prime Area.

Resources

Communication resources are located in classrooms according to the needs of individual pupils within those classes. Resources are ordered in line with the school budget. Some resources may be provided by SALT. Each room has access to the agreed objects of reference, and many classes introduce the days of the week using a set aroma and colour. Careful consideration is given to resourcing for ASD pupils to ensure they are selected for the individual and that they are motivating.

ICT provision

ICT is used to support the development of communication skills in both low and high tech forms. A range of speech output devices are used to assist speaking and listening activities, and may comprise of electronic aids, big macks, big points, digital photos or symbol packages such as Boardmaker.

Boardmaker programme is used to produce symbols for use in PECS books, as visual aids in lessons, and as part of displays. Pupils can also type their own text into this programme so that their writing is accompanied by symbols if appropriate.

Cross Curricular Links

Communication skills are used and developed in all areas of the curriculum which allows for individual targets to be addressed in a number of contexts throughout the week. Motivating situations, in which children can enjoy developing their communication skills in a meaningful, functional and enjoyable way are facilitated throughout the day.

Differentiation

IEP targets for communication and termly objectives for speaking and listening are differentiated to meet the specific needs of individual pupils including these with ASD. Activities are planned which allow for the inclusion of all pupils as active participants within lessons.

Equal Opportunities

The educational opportunities at Fox Wood School are available to all pupils irrespective of sex, religious belief, ethnic or socio-economic background. An overview of each pupil's method of communication is reviewed annually and distributed to each class so all staff are informed.

Assessment, Recording and Reporting

Targets for IEPs may be taken from B squared, which divides speaking and listening into receptive and expressive communication at P-levels, or directly from programmes provided by SALT.

Methods of assessment and recording include on-going observation within class and evaluation of IEP and lesson objectives which are in turn transferred to B squared assessment on the network. Samples of work or photographic evidence is included in pupils' RoAs, Learning Journals, Work Files or accreditation files. Reporting to parents takes place via annual reports and the person centred annual review process and where appropriate, through the home-school diary.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Quality assurance is ensured by following the procedures outlined in the Teaching and Learning, and Monitoring and Evaluation policies, by means of moderation meetings, evaluation of IEP targets, monitoring of SALT programmes, etc.

This policy will be reviewed on a regular basis. Any suggested amendments will be presented to the governors and shared with staff.

Health, Safety and Welfare

It is the duty of all staff to take reasonable care for the health and safety of themselves and others that may be affected by their actions.

Home/School Liaison

It is important that parents and carers are made aware of the individual communication system used by their child, and this takes place through liaison with SALT who offer to meet with parents to provide information and training. Specific targets for communication are discussed at the IEP and annual review meetings and through the annual reports. Links with parents are also maintained through home-school diaries, special assemblies, parents evening, and workshops.

Alternative and Augmentive Communication (AAC)

Introduction

Alternative and Augmentative Communication is used to describe the different methods that can be used to help people with disabilities communicate with others. As the term suggests these methods can be used as an alternative to speech or to supplement it.

No matter what their difficulties few pupils can be said to have no method of communication. However, many pupils will have difficulty in getting their message across and it must always be remembered that this will require effort on the part of the listener (communication partner) as well.

Communication is essentially a two-way process which must involve some degree of mutual understanding and a commonly agreed method. Even when two people can talk and understand the same language easily there can be misunderstanding and failed communication.

Symbol systems

A variety of symbol systems are in use in school. Systems are often combined with individually designed symbols, objects and photographs if required. They are presented in different ways including using a computer screen, a paper chart or communication book (See PECS). Our aim is for uniformity in the symbols we use and an audit will be carried out to promote this.

They are produced by drawing the symbols, photocopying or using a computer programme to print out charts. Symbols are widely used throughout the school for timetables, diaries, dinner menus, expectations and explanation. They are used in conjunction with PECS or with communication aids.

Signing and gesture

Manual signing systems have been in use for some time, especially in the deaf community. Different systems have been developed to meet the needs of individuals with learning and motor disabilities. Signing systems have the major advantage of not requiring any additional equipment or materials, but can be harder to learn. The school uses a system based on Makaton.

Communication Aids

There are a wide range of devices used in school. These range from simple devices such as a big mack with a single message, to complex devices or portable computers. Electronic aids are used alongside, or instead of, other systems, such as paper based charts, signing systems and other low tech methods of communication.

Few pupils with communication difficulties will use only one particular method of communication. In most cases somebody using an electronic aid will reinforce its messages with gesture, head movement etc.

The more complex aids, such as an iPad with grid player on (for example) has the ability to hold a large number of messages. The user is usually able to combine key presses or selections to produce different messages. In this way, a machine with a limited number of keys is able to produce a much larger number of messages. Different messages are usually selected by the user pressing a combination of keys, or by using a dynamic screen display with changes so that the user is presented with different arrays of messages.

Many users of electronic aids use a symbol or pictorial system to associate the images with larger messages.

Proloquo2Go is a symbol supported communication app to promote language development and increase communication skills and this may be used if appropriate.

PECS

What is PECS?

- ☐ PECS is an approach that develops early communication skills using pictures. More than using pictures for visual support, PECS is a functional communication system that develops important communication and social skills.
- ☐ PECS is appropriate for people of all ages with a wide range of learning difficulties. Originally developed for pre-school children with autism, PECS is successfully used with adults and children with a range of communication difficulties.
- ☐ PECS can be used anywhere that someone communicates. PECS can be successfully implemented by family members or professionals. It does not require expensive or complex equipment and overcomes disadvantages that may be found with signing.
- ☐ PECS focuses on communication that is relevant and motivating to each student. Pupils are taught to exchange pictures for things they want in their environment. For example, if they want a drink they will give a picture of a drink to an adult who will then give them a drink.
- ☐ PECS teaches pupils to initiate, as spontaneous communication is the goal. Using this 'exchange' format, skills that are critical to communication such as approaching another person, interacting with that person, and doing this spontaneously, are incorporated from the start.
- ☐ PECS has a clear programme to follow, divided into six phases. Beginning with using single pictures to communicate their needs, pupils are then taught to discriminate between a variety of pictures and then to construct increasingly complex sentences. The pictures and sentence strip are all stored in a portable communication book, attached with Velcro®, so they can be easily removed when the pupil wants to communicate.
- ☐ PECS and speech development. The aim of PECS is to give the pupil a functional communication system. However, one should be aware of the number of children who also develop speech while using PECS. PECS has also been successfully used for pupils who have developed speech, but may not be using it communicatively.

PHASE 1

How to communicate

Pupils learn to exchange single pictures for items or activities they really want

PHASE II

Distance and Persistence

Still using single pictures, pupils learn to generalise this new skill by using it in different places, with different people and across distances. They are also taught to be more persistent communicators

PHASE III

Picture Discrimination

Pupils learn to select from two or more pictures to ask for their favourite things. These are placed in a communication book – a ring binder with Velcro® strips allowing pictures to be stored and easily removed for communication.

PHASE IV

Sentence Structure

Pupils learn to construct simple sentences on a detachable sentence strip using an 'I want' picture followed by a picture of the item being requested.

PHASE V

Answering Questions

Pupils learn to use PECS to answer the question, "What do you want?"

PHASE VI

Commenting

Now Pupils are taught to comment in response to questions like 'What do you see?', 'What do you hear?', 'What is it?' etc. They learn to make up sentences starting with 'I see', 'I hear', 'I feel', 'It is a', etc.

Attributes and language Expansion

Students learn to expand their sentences by adding adjectives, verbs, prepositions, etc.

Intensive Interaction

Introduction

Based on work carried out at the Harperbury Hospital School in Hertfordshire, this approach has been used successfully with people whose unresponsiveness and/or mannerisms may hinder or prevent the development of a close relationship with other people.

Drawing on the 'natural' model of early child development, staff try to identify ways of relating to pupils. Rather than setting out to change someone's behaviour, this approach tries to establish communication with them – but in their own way, and on their own terms. It has been possible to persuade those who are in 'another world', or who are wrapped up in emotional states of anxiety and fear, to choose to make contact with staff.

The approach usually starts with a process similar to parent/baby interaction, and aims initially to develop an awareness in the child of the presence of an adult. The parent may play with the child, imitating noises and gestures in a way which they both enjoy. As the relationship develops, the child learns that it can make demands and get some of the things it wants. Very small babies discover that they have the power to control many key aspects of their lives.

Intensive interaction is developed through four key stages which are known as development stages: awareness, anticipation, pre-emption and voluntary signals.

Stage 1: Awareness

The individual becomes aware of the other person (communicative partner), when previously they may have been engaged in stereotypical behaviours such as hand flapping, string-twiddling or eye-poking. They may show awareness by stopping the activity momentarily or in the case of a severely physically disabled person, showing a change in muscle tone or posture. This may involve sitting close and copying the pupils actions or holding out a hand for them to touch.

Stage2: Anticipation

At this stage, the individual anticipates that the carer is going to engage with them. Again, they signal awareness, but now this happens before the carer actually engages. Staff may use 'peek-a-boo' games to encourage this stage or repetitive actions such as tickling which can then be paused so the pupil looks for the expected tickle.

Stage 3: Pre-emption

Here the anticipation is more active, and the individual shows clearer signals. These might include leading a staff member towards something, placing the staff member's hand on an object or showing eye movement towards an activity that the individual wishes the staff member to share in.

Stage 4: Voluntary signals

Here pre-emptive actions are changed to deliberate acts by the individual to engage the carer in particular activities.

In using this technique, it is important that however unpleasant staff may find the individual's dribbling, scratching, or repetitive behaviour, they show the individual that they consistently care about him/her by concentrating upon him/her when 'interacting' and providing a safe environment, which is meaningful to that person.

Play should develop from prompts by the individual, not from staff. When the individual decides that they no longer wish to participate, the staff member must also stop and wait for the individual to instigate the activity again. In this way, the person learns that they can influence other people – they can develop some power to control their world so it is vitally important that staff do not try to dominate.

Intensive interaction can develop mutual trust, eye contact, physical contact and turn taking, all vital components of communication development, and can also be fun.

On Body Signing

Body signing is a tactile communication system designed to inform pupils of what is about to happen. It was developed for pupils who have no or extremely limited expressive language. When they are used consistently in routines they should allow the pupil to gradually make sense of what otherwise could be chaotic experiences. Making the patterns, routines and sequences of life explicit to the pupil through the use of these signs will increase their feeling of security. Pupils may develop anticipation of events when using on-body signing for routines e.g. going to be moved, work is starting etc. They should be accompanied by clear, simple speech