

Inclusive Communication Approach

In our setting, all forms of communication are respected and responded to. Pupils are supported to make use of a wide range of strategies to communicate their wants, needs, ideas, feelings and thoughts, including:

- facial expression, gesture or eye-gaze
- tactile communication, object cues or TOBIs (True Object Based Icons)
- signing systems, such as Makaton
- low tech alternative and augmentative (AAC) systems such as PECS, communication books, communication boards, E – tran frames
- vocalisations, single words or spoken sentences
- high tech AAC systems for those children whose physical difficulties affect their ability to use low tech systems (e.g. to turn the pages on a book or to point to a symbol on a communication board) or for those pupils where low tech systems have been trialled and are not sufficient to meet their communication needs *

The decision about which modes of communication to teach and use is based on evaluation of a child's strengths and needs and their communication and cognitive abilities, alongside their previous responses to different communication systems. All progress is valued and celebrated, not just progress with speech.

We understand that when we as adults communicate (as verbal communicators), we use a range of methods to get our message across, including speech, gesture, body language, facial expression, symbols and written language. The same applies to the pupils and it is recognised that they may use multiple modes of communication. We respect each mode. For example, if a child indicates with their eye contact and facial expression that they want 'more' of something, they do not then need to use their AAC system to say 'more'. However, the child's PECS book or communication book could be used by the adult to provide a model and expansion to 'more' e.g. 'more drink', 'more play dough'

How an inclusive communication environment is achieved:

We aim to provide an inclusive communication environment where staff support and promote communication and its development throughout the school day, through formal and informal learning opportunities in lessons, play, social interaction and by having fun together.

We use a range of communication approaches in these interactions such as Intensive Interaction, the Makaton Communication Programme, Attention Autism, Gestalt Language Processing strategies, Colour Coded Sentences, the Blank Language Scheme and Cued Articulation.

We recognise the importance of the pupils seeing their communication systems being modelled and used by the staff around them e.g. Makaton, communication boards and books. We know that it increases the child's understanding of the vocabulary in their system, how it works and also that their ways of communicating are valued. We try to ensure that communication systems are accessible to the children at all times.

Good communication is present in:

- The physical environment – PECS, communication boards and books, visual timetables, clear, accessible labels, clear activity instructions and learning materials at the right language and communication level.

- The social environment – staff interacting with the pupils (not just to deliver instructions) at the right language and communication level and responding to all of a child's communication attempts.

School has a Communication Scheme of Work and all children have communication targets as part of their Individual Learning Plan.

Training:

One INSET day per year is allocated to staff training in relation to key communication approaches and strategies. Communication focused twilight sessions are also routinely provided throughout the academic year to provide refreshers and updates.

Weekly communication groups are provided across the school by the communication LSA. This provides opportunities for staff to observe a range of communication strategies being used with the pupils.

Speech and Language Therapy:

School has access to speech and language therapy support from therapists employed by Hampshire and Isle of Wight NHS Foundation Trust and Hampshire County Council. The level and type of input provided is subject to each of their referral criteria and service specifications. Independent therapists may also visit the school.

School will liaise with therapists for those children who are on the speech and language therapy caseload, and targets will be jointly set between the therapist and teaching staff.

***Use of high tech AAC systems - specifically communication apps installed onto tablet devices (e.g. iPads) for those pupils who do not have physical difficulties**

As a school, we feel that we can support low tech AAC systems effectively and we would generally introduce systems such as PECS, communication boards or a communication book before considering a communication app. Low tech does not mean 'not as good as' high tech – it means the system does not need a battery or to be charged.

We understand that we need to match the AAC system to the individual, and that a pupil may not be able to fulfil their communicative abilities with the same system as other children. We know that it is important to remember that we need to match the AAC system to the individual – one size does not fit all – and that some children may have a preference for using a tablet, such as an iPad.

When an iPad is being explored, consideration will need to be given as to how the device can be effectively supported in the child's classroom setting. It's important that adults can use the device themselves to model it, and that differences in the symbols system used within the apps and across school can be accommodated. Many pupils have sensory differences and strong interests, and iPads being available in the classroom at all times could create some challenges for them.

If a family would like advice about using a communication app at home with their child, we will discuss with them the current communication system in place and how it is being used at home. If a child is already using a communication app or the family decides to introduce one at home, then this will be supported or we will use the hard copy / printed version of the app in school.

For those children where low tech systems have been tried in school for an extended period of time and are considered to not be meeting their needs, then a communication app on a tablet will be explored. This decision will be made following evaluation of the pupil's existing system and also of the environment, including the child's opportunities to communicate across the school day and the amount of staff modelling of the low tech system.

A referral to speech and language therapy will then be completed, requesting an assessment that includes trialling a communication app. If a device is recommended, then the speech and language therapist will write a report that specifies the funding requirements and amendments needed to the child's EHCP in terms of speech and language therapy provision to set up and implement the device in school.