



## **OUR PLACE SCHOOLS**

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**Total Communication Policy**

## Total Communication Policy

A Total Communication approach is used to develop the functional communication of children attending Our Place.

Total communication means that we encourage the use of all appropriate means of communication:

- Verbal skills including speaking and listening
- Signing including gesture and body language
- Written text
- Picture symbols accompanied by written word(s)
- Photographs
- Objects of reference
- High Tec. communication aids (such as the Go Talk range)
- Low Tec. Aids e.g. symbolic/pictorial representation

### Our aims

- to help children find a way of expressing themselves using good functional communication.
- to enable children to develop their receptive and expressive communication skills
- each child's individual communication system(s) will be used consistently across the school site and off site, including assistance to parents/carers.
- all staff are expected to contribute to the maintenance of individual's communication system(s) but a child's Key Worker and teacher are the Speech and Language Therapy Department's primary contacts.
- all staff will be able to understand and work with all aspects of total communication and are offered training (induction, mandatory, signing sessions, off- site day courses) throughout the year.



## **The Speech and Language Therapy Department**

The Speech and Language Therapy Department at Our Place has a Speech and Language Therapist, a Speech and Language Therapy Assistant who works 3 days a week in school as a TA and 1 day a week as a SLT Assistant during term-time.

### **Other Support**

SLT is also supported by the teachers and support worker who help us with making symbols, laminating and photocopying.

### **Situation**

Speech and Language share an office with Education & Care, this helps to facilitate cross department communications, and leads to discussion of good practise and the sharing of ideas.

### **Off-Site Speech and Language Therapy Liaison**

We have contact with the SLT departments in other schools in the surrounding counties.

### **Continuing Professional Development**

We follow the C.P.D. guidelines from the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists and the Health Professions Council. These are:

- Work based learning
- Professional activity
- Formal educational
- Self-directed learning
- Other ( voluntary work, public service, courses)

A full list of CPD activities is available in the appendix.



## **Standards and Procedures**

### **Initial Assessment – prior to pupil arrival**

- Gather information from previous placement - face to face and written documentation
- Set up any communication supports that have been successfully used previously - e.g. visual timetables, chat books, Picture Exchange Communication System files for class and the residence. Contact with parents, where possible, re: communication at home.
- Carried out during the child's first half-term at Our Place by the Speech and Language Therapist (SL T) and/ or the Speech and Language Therapy Assistant:
  1. Observation in class and the residence and informal assessment.
  2. Discussion with the Teacher, TAs, Team Coordinators and SWs in class and in the residence.
- Continual monitoring of approaches so that rapid progress can be made towards establishing an effective communication system for the child.

### **Follow-on Assessment**

- Carried out during first month 1-1 with the Speech and Language Therapist.
- Use of appropriate formal assessments - e.g. Early Communication Profile, Test of Receptive Grammar, DASS
- Use of appropriate informal assessments - e.g. sequencing, time concepts, verbal understanding, functional communication.
- Assessment of an individual's mealtime procedure is carried out, usually at break and lunchtime, when requested.
- Discussions with the Teacher, TAs, SWs and Team Coordinators.

### **Communications Targets**

- A full set of communication targets is written up after assessment has been completed.
- Communication targets are agreed with the Teacher and the Key Worker in the first instance and discussed, where possible, with all Team Coordinators and SWs.
- Copies of communication targets are given to the teacher, Registered Manager, psychology department, residential staff (a copy goes to the Children's Care Supervisor via the Key Worker and is kept in the child's file).

### **Resources to Develop Communications**

- All resources that are needed to support the development and maintenance of an individual's communication will be provided by the Speech and Language Therapy Department, following discussion with the Teacher and Key Worker.
- TAs and the Key Worker in the residence have the responsibility of maintaining the equipment. Support is readily available from the SLT department.



## **Review of Communications Skills**

- An annual review of a child's communication skills is carried out with input from Key Workers in class and in the residence.
- Reassessment, using formal and informal assessments, is carried out as and when appropriate.
- Targets are updated and the necessary equipment provided.
- A full report is written for the annual, transition and final review. Communication targets are attached, as are mealtime procedures and relevant assessments where appropriate.
- A communication profile is produced for each child, outlining key information, which is laminated and distributed to parents, education and residential staff and forms part of the transition documentation.

## **Meetings with Key Workers**

- The Speech and Language Therapy Department will meet with Key Workers at their request at a convenient time. The SLT department will request meetings with Key Workers as and when this is necessary.

## **Transitions**

- We aim to make an individual's transition from Our Place to another placement as smooth as possible.
- We aim to meet with workers from the new placement on a number of occasions to discuss the person's communication needs, explain, and model the use of all equipment.
- We will send a communication profile and transfer all the necessary communication equipment to the new placement.
- We will offer training in the new placement, where possible, to enable a smooth transition of the child's communication skills.

## **Recording**

Any work carried out with a child is recorded by hand in the child's individual communication file. These are kept in a filing cabinet in the speech and language therapy office. An additional file may also be kept for completed work and worksheets. Copies of reports, communication programmes, assessments (or write-ups of assessments) are copied for the Teacher (and residential and other professional staff where appropriate) and may be included in the annual review of the statement report.

All practices and strategies to be used are written up and accompany any work that is being undertaken.

## **Resources**

Copies of all resources used by individual children in school, the residence or at home are kept in a separate file in the speech and language therapy office. This helps us to quickly replace picture symbols, visual timetables, sign books, etc. should they go missing.



## **Video Recording**

We aim to make videos of good practice in the classroom and of speech and language therapy sessions. These can then be used for developing ideas for use with an individual child or a number of children; they can also be used as part of the school's communication training programme and to induct new staff, parents and interested others to individual child's communication methods.

## **Liaison**

The Speech and Language Therapy Department aims to initiate, encourage and develop good liaison with people based both on and off site. It is important for us to continue to work towards building up a good liaison network so that communication strategies may be used with individual children consistently. This approach helps to build up a child's confidence in using total communication and reduce any anxiety and frustration in their mind that may be associated with attempting to communicate with others.

### **On-site Liaison**

We aim to develop liaison with:

- Education staff
- Residential staff
- Other professionals based on site: the psychology department and school nurse

On-site liaison may take the form of:

- Discussions with relevant education and residential staff about an individual's communication targets and strategies, mealtime procedures, need for staff training, etc. An open-door policy enables staff to discuss relevant issues, resources and good practice there and then or, alternatively, set a time that is convenient for both parties
- A weekly meeting between the psychology and SL T department to discuss individual children, written reports and guidelines issued by both departments and other issues
- Regular, separate meetings with Senior Management Team (both formal and informal) including the Responsible Person, Registered Manager, Home Coordinator, Team Coordinators and the Children's Care Supervisor. These vary in regularity, most being pre-booked and meetings but others may take place as the need arises

### **Off-site Liaison**

We also aim to provide and develop good liaison with those based off site:

- Parents
- Speech and Language Therapists involved in the care of new or leaving child
- Those people involved in the transition process who will be working with our child in their future placement.
- Speech and Language Therapists and assistants based at other special schools.

The level of liaison for those based off site may vary from individual to individual. It may take the form of:



- face-to-face meetings
- telephone conversations
- written information
- training for the new placement

We always aim to ensure that each school leaver takes their resources with them to the next placement. This may include their Picture Exchange Communication System file containing a full set of photos or picture symbols, a personal signing book, a chat book, visual timetable, etc. Each child also leaves with recent reports, which may include communication targets, copies of assessments and strategies used and an up to-date communication profile outlining their communication strengths and weaknesses.

## **Functional Communication**

All children verbal and non-verbal, are working towards good functional communication. The school works according to Maggie Johnson's successful approach, outlined in the manual 'Functional Communication at home and in the classroom', covering active listening, appropriateness, turn taking and organization.

Verbal children may be working on one or two areas at one time. For example, developing active listening so that they can indicate when they have not understood or say when they do not understand a particular word and also learning to maintain a conversation for more than one conversation exchange.

Non-verbal children may be working on good listening and turn-taking skills.

## **Assessment**

We use two checklists, available as part of Maggie Johnson's course handouts, to evaluate a verbal child's functional communication ability and to clarify the areas that need input:

- 'Talking together' is filled out by the Speech and Language Therapist, SLT Assistant, in discussion with the Teacher, Key Worker and / or unit manager.
- The 'Time Concept chart' is completed by the Speech and Language Therapist, SLT Assistant and the Teacher.

These assessments are also used to review progress and set new targets at regular intervals during the year.

## **Functional Communication Training**

We aim to teach all staff the strategies that are most successful in developing good functional communication:

- Functional communication forms part of Communication training: part 2, a 3 hour course for staff who have completed Communication training: part 2.
- We provide advice and modelling for staff as and when it is needed.

## **Decisions on Expressive Communication Systems**

We aim to find a way for each child to communicate with others, on and off site. Taking into account information from their previous placement plus early assessment on arrival, children are encouraged to use an expressive system that they can initiate, rather than respond to.



The Picture Exchange Communication System is used extensively across site in all situations and teaching contexts. For some pupils, PECS will augment other communication systems in use. For other pupils, PECS may be their main or only means of establishing effective functional communication.

- PECS is a communication system that a number of children have used at previous placements.
- PECS encourages functional verbal communication.
- PECS encourages the child to initiate a request or comment and develops other social and functional communication skills such as eye contact, making contact with others, turn taking, humour and organization.
- The PECS principles can be put into practice using 1 to 4 inch picture symbols (with text underneath), photos and, to a lesser degree, objects of reference.
- We aim to support progression by finding the appropriate medium for each child. Those children that are unable to use PECS will be transferred to alternative systems to develop their skills.

## **Intensive Interaction**

Intensive interaction is used primarily with hard-to-reach children. It encourages social interaction and is led by the child. No demands are put on the child; it is up to the staff member to follow the child's lead and to help them build on it. It encourages eye contact, smiling, turn taking and vocalization.

At Our Place we use intensive interaction strategies as taught by Dave Hewitt.

Intensive interaction is carried out 1-1:

- Usually, it is carried out in a quiet, relaxing room with an adult, the child and sometimes an observer.
- It may be part of a child's timetable of activities, as part of their communication syllabus.
- It may be carried out by the Speech and Language Therapist or assistant, Teacher, TAs, SWs.
- It may be carried out at an appropriate moment with a member of the residential staff in the child's residence.
- It may be carried out in between activities in class.

## **Intensive Interaction Training**

- Intensive interaction training is available as part of Communication training in induction
- Either the Speech and Language Therapist or Assistant or the Teacher may carry out modelling good practice for a member of staff





## Signing

Our Place supports the use of signing across and off site. Signing is seen as a valuable support to verbal language for all children, both in providing a visual focus and supporting verbal understanding and as an expressive form of communication for some children.

### Signing Systems Used

- We use a predominantly Makaton based signing system at Our Place.
- Where Makaton is unable to furnish signs, we use sign-a-long and finger spelling. Occasionally we may also need to use signs from the Beverley School for the Deaf signbook. **Supporting the Development and Maintenance of Signing**
- All staff are encouraged to use signing across and off site when talking with children.
- Children are encouraged to sign, whether they are able to use 1 or 200 signs.
- Children's IEPs may well contain signing targets as appropriate to their behavioural needs.
- New staff are introduced to signing through the core signing booklet of 50 signs at their induction training.
- Weekly signing practice is provided during term time for all SWs. Staff are encouraged to attend at least 2 signing practices per term.
- Mandatory communication training (parts 1 and 2) include signing practice for all staff at their relevant level.
- Eight levels of signing competency (booklets attached) have been introduced to encourage all staff to develop their signing vocabulary. Timetabled slots for taking a signing competency test are offered to staff. An Our Place certificate, specifying the signing level, is given to those who pass their competency test
- Children are encouraged to take the signing competencies.

### Recording Signs

- Children who use signing as their primary means of communication and those who use signing as a secondary, but valuable, means of communication are provided with an individual book recording these signs.

### Individual Sign Books

- The sign book records the signs that the child uses accurately and spontaneously (line drawings); those that are used inaccurately, but consistently, (a photo of the individual attempting the sign + the target sign as a line drawing); signs that the child will copy (line drawing).

### Other Signing Activities

- Signing is encouraged in the music, dance and drama sessions as well as story telling sessions.



## Signing Representatives

- Each team is asked to provide a signing representative to support the use of signing on their team. A signing pack is given to each representative at their first meeting with the Speech and Language Therapy Assistant.
- The representatives are responsible for the upkeep of an alphabetical sign box, to suggest new signing vocabulary, to monitor the use of signing by individual staff and to liaise with the SLT department.

## Symbols

The use of symbols in communication at Our Place is wide ranging. Although the spoken and written word is used throughout the school and residences, many children need to use symbols in other forms to access and support expressive and receptive language.

## Symbol Forms

We use three forms of symbols at Our Place

1. objects of reference: used with those children whose communication is predominantly at the pre-intentional and intentional level but who have yet to consistently manage the use of 2 dimensional symbols in a formal communication system.
2. photographs: used with those children who can recognise 2 dimensional representations of an object but are unable to recognise colour or black and white line drawings consistently.
3. picture symbols: Widget picture symbols are used with children who have the ability to recognise black and white or colour picture symbols.

Photographs and picture symbols will be of varying sizes, depending on the ability of the child. They range in size from 1 inch up to A4. Different sizes may be used for different purposes (e.g. a Teacher may use an A4 size symbol to the whole class when setting up the daily timetable, whilst the children may be using 1, 2, or 4 inch symbols or photos).

We have a uniform use of Widget picture symbols across the site. A copy of these is kept in the resources room for reference and updated every 6 months by the Speech and Language Therapy Assistant.

Children may be encouraged to use more than one form of symbol - e.g. photographs for transition and picture symbols on their timetable. We are constantly attempting to move children from one form of symbol to the next level -e.g. objects of reference to photographs.

## Symbol Use

All forms of symbols will be used across site. Symbols may be used as a means of expression - e.g. the Picture Exchange Communication System, pointing boards - and as a support to verbal understanding - e.g. social stories, timetables and calendars. Each child will have access to one or more of these visual supports using symbols relevant to their communication ability:



## Expression

- The Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)
- A pointing file/board

## Verbal understanding

- Visual timetable
- 'Working towards' system
- Feelings board, body parts board
- Social stories
- Wait card
- Don't touch card
- Chew and swallow card
- Chat book
- Finished card
- Sequencing board

All these visual support systems are personalised to meet the need of individual children and a brief description on how to use them included.

Other symbol based systems that may be used in the classroom and residences include:

- Personal PECs files – everyone, staff and children, at Our Place will have on them at all times a basic photo communication file so that a child can communicate at all times. Each child's personal file will have symbols or photos as pertinent to themselves
- Emotions boards
- Photo Menu board
- Requests board in the dining room
- Jobs board
- Feelings board
- Photo staffing board – to assist children to know who is on duty at that time
- Reward systems
- Computer work - e.g. letters home, ASDAN recording.

## Symbol Training for Staff

All new staff are introduced to all forms of symbol used in school during their induction.

- Further training on all forms of symbol use ( using objects of reference, photos and picture symbols) is provided within the regular monthly communication training (Communication training: part 1). Staff are encouraged to sign up for these sessions which accounts for three hours towards their mandatory training.
- Any symbol support introduced for an individual child is discussed with the Teacher and TAs and modelled over one or more sessions by the Speech and Language Therapist or the SL T Assistant.
- Support in the production of symbols and reviewing their use is available from the speech and language therapy team for all staff.
- There is a PECS representative for each team. They meet individually with our Speech and Language Therapy Assistant on a monthly basis.



## **Children's Charter**

The children's charter is written in picture symbols and written text and is available from the Speech and Language Therapy Department or the Head of School. A DVD of the children's charter is also available for children and their parents. The DVD uses three language forms:

- spoken word
- signing
- picture symbols

enabling easier access to the information.

An accompanying complaints' procedure booklet has been produced in picture symbols and using photographs of relevant staff in the complaints' procedure.

## **Mealtime Procedures**

Eating and drinking is a complex sequence of actions that develops at different rates when children have diverse learning and behavioural difficulties.

The Speech and Language Therapy Department will encourage and support good eating and drinking by assessing individuals, suggesting ways of developing good eating and drinking skills and providing appropriate resources.

## **Referral**

Children who are experiencing any problems with eating and drinking should be referred to the Speech and Language Therapy Department for assessment.

## **Assessment**

The Speech and Language Therapist and / or the SLT Assistant will observe the child in class at break times and in their residence at lunchtime on, at least, 2 occasions.

The observations will be recorded on a mealtime assessment sheet.

Preliminary suggestions are then put together and discussed with the Team Coordinators, Key Worker and relevant education staff.

## **Written Procedures**

There are two written procedures relating to eating and drinking skills used in school:

- A mealtime procedure outlining good practice and support available.
- An individual mealtime procedure, agreed with the Team Coordinator and Key Worker, outlining good practice with a particular child, which is then modelled by the Speech and Language Therapist or Assistant on a number of occasions.
- The individual procedure is reviewed and updated at regular intervals



## **Resources**

The Speech and Language Therapy Department will provide resources in the form of:

- Written visual supports for individual children (such as 'chew and swallow' reminder cards, mealtime social stories) presented in an accessible form for the individual.
- Support and training to implement the procedure.
- Special equipment such as angled utensils. Speech and Language Therapy Department will order specialist equipment.

## **Training**

The use of general mealtime procedures is included in the communication induction training.

Mandatory Communication training: part 2 offers more in-depth training, including looking at individual procedures and their implementation and the range of resources available.

**Please also see the school Communication and Literacy Policy**

