

Policy and Guidance for Supporting the Communication and Interaction of Pupils

This document lays out the whole school approach to supporting communication and interaction for all pupils at Newfield School. It forms the whole school policy and contains within it guidance to support staff in promoting pupils functional communication skills.

Introduction

Why is communication important?

Communication is at the heart of human interaction. It promotes social engagement and inclusion and through communication needs are met and desires achieved. It is a fundamental human right. Every person under the Human Rights Act 1998 has a right to express themselves and hold opinions.

'The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child' is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history and was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989 and ratified by the UK in 1991. The following articles pertain directly to the right of children and young people to communicate and achieve to the best of their ability and be included in their communities.

12 - Every child has the right to say what they think in all matters affecting them, and to have their views taken seriously.

13 - Every child must be free to say what they think and to seek and receive information of any kind as long as it is within the law.

29 - Education must develop every child's personality, talents and abilities to the full. It must encourage the child's respect for human rights, as well as respect for their parents, their own and other cultures, and the environment.

30 - Every child has the right to learn and use the language, customs and religion of their family whether or not these are shared by the majority of the people in the country where they live.

The forms of communication that exist in human interaction are varied and range from sending an email to raising an eyebrow. This policy aims to outline the aims and rationale of our approach to communication and teaching our pupils at Newfield School to be effective communicators.

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Communication for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disability

Effective communication empowers those who are vulnerable to be able 'to understand and be understood'. At Newfield School we strive to empower pupils by equipping them to be effective communicators as they progress through life. We celebrate the variance of communication styles within our school and value each equally. It is our aim for our children and young people to have their communication needs met in a consistent and coherent way across settings.

The National Joint Committee for the Communication Needs of Persons with Severe Disabilities in America created Communication Bill of Rights (1992). At Newfield School we support the following as rights of our pupils and aim to create an ethos in school which promotes these rights.

Each person has the right to

- *request desired objects, actions, events and people*
 - *refuse undesired objects, actions, or events*
 - *express personal preferences and feelings*
 - *be offered choices and alternatives*
 - *reject offered choices*
 - *request and receive another person's attention and interaction*
 - *ask for and receive information about changes in routine and environment*
 - *receive intervention to improve communication skills*
 - *receive a response to any communication, whether or not the responder can fulfill the request*
 - *have access to AAC (augmentative and alternative communication) and other AT (assistive technology) services and devices at all times*
 - *have AAC and other AT devices that function properly at all times*
 - *be in environments that promote one's communication as a full partner with other people, including peers*
 - *be spoken to with respect and courtesy*
 - *be spoken to directly and not be spoken for or talked about in the third person while present*
 - *have clear, meaningful and culturally and linguistically appropriate communication*
- From the National Joint Committee for the Communicative Needs of Persons with Severe Disabilities (1992). Guidelines for meeting the communication needs of persons with severe disabilities. Asha, 34(Suppl. 7), 2–3.*

Aims

In order to support the communication needs of pupils at Newfield School we aim to:

1. To nurture a total communication approach across the school
2. To support individual communication needs of each child to enable them to understand and be understood

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3. To create and promote opportunities for communication throughout the day
4. Liaise with home and other settings to enable communication needs to be met in a consistent and coherent way.

Total Communication

At Newfield School we define the concept of Total Communication in line with the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT):

Total Communication 'describes an approach that seeks to create a supportive means of communication to understand and be understood'

Total Communication acknowledges all forms of communication including body language, gesture, photographs, symbols, signing, objects and more creative mediums such as music and art. Total Communication supports learning and understanding by presenting information in a variety of ways.

Speech and Language Therapy at Newfield School

The Speech and language therapy team provide:

- Detailed assessment of communication and eating and swallowing abilities in pupils
- Advice and training related to specific pupils or wider communication or feeding issues to staff, parents and associated professionals
- Assessment for suitability for a variety of alternative and augmentative communication systems including communication aids
- therapy either individual, small group or class group according to needs of pupils
- Provide written advice and programmes for staff and parents
- provide input to annual review and pupil development profiles

It is essential that the Speech and language team aim to work as part of the school team with the pupil's needs as central

Communication Strategies used in School

Makaton

The Makaton website describes its approach as:

Makaton is a language programme using signs and symbols to help people communicate. It is designed to support spoken language and the signs and symbols are used with speech in spoken word order.

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Makaton signing is used extensively to support communication in school in areas such as receptive communication, singing and music and supporting lesson delivery.

Objects of Reference

Objects of reference are used to help pupils who require concrete, tactile or unambiguous support to understand language. They are most frequently used to support the communication needs of individuals who have a severely impaired ability to comprehend more abstract forms or who have a visual impairment. It is important that objects of reference are meaningful to the individual and the ACE-Centre recommend that objects used should be carefully selected as those which follow the MMF rule; that is they are Meaningful (see below) they communicate something that is Motivating and they are used Frequently. Objects of reference can be used in the ways outlined below but it is vital to ensure they are personalised and relevant to the individual.

1: Real life objects used in the activity

The object of reference in these cases would be an object that represents the activity to the pupil and then is actually used in the activity e.g. showing a child their coat to indicate that it is playtime, or the cup they going to have their drink in to indicate snack time.

2: Objects not used in the activity

In this case the object of reference indicates to the person what the activity will be but is NOT used in the activity. For example, a spoon stuck to a card may show the person it is dinnertime but the spoon is not used to eat the dinner.

3: Objects with a shared feature

Objects of reference which have properties related to the activity can be communicatively effective for some pupil .e.g. a piece of vinyl to indicate the soft play area

4: Miniature objects

In this case the miniature object represents the activity e.g. miniature brush for hair brushing. It is important to ensure the object conveys meaning to the pupil

5: Abstract objects

Abstract objects are unrelated to the activity but convey meaning to the pupil. E.g. a sports wristband to indicate going outside. The objects are most likely to have been selected by the pupil.

The important point to remember is that what is relevant to one person may not be relevant to another, and so the procedure of selecting objects of reference may be different for each person.

Intensive Interaction

- It is an approach which involves interacting with the child in a way that is directed and initiated by the child.
- Intensive Interaction is carried out on a one to one basis where is the adult is the main resource available to the child.

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- The adult imitates all of the actions and vocalisations carried out by the child.

The British Institute of Learning Disabilities describe Intensive Interaction in their publication 'Some communication tools and approaches that may be useful'

Intensive Interaction is a powerful way of 'being' with another person and reaching those who are hard to reach. It involves basic interaction and communication and sharing somebody else's world through using their own language (whatever it may be). It helps the person with learning difficulties and their communication partner to relate better to each other and enjoy each other's company more. It uses body, voice and another person's presence to develop communicative exchanges in ways suited to each person. Intensive Interaction can be used as a way of teaching the fundamentals of communication, as a way to build relationships, or simply a way of pleasurably spending time with other people. It is one way of establishing and maintain contact with people on their own terms and is a concrete way of showing respect and commitment to listening to them as much as possible.

Intensive Interaction develops the fundamentals of communication:

- use and understanding of eye contact
- use of facial expressions
- learning to 'read' facial expressions
- learning to enjoy giving attention to another person
- taking turns in exchanges of behaviour
- use and understanding of physical contact
- use and understanding of gestures
- learning to 'read' body language
- learning about personal space
- learning to concentrate and attend

Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)

The PECS approach was devised by Andrew Bondy and Lori Frost. It is a structured approach to assist children with communication difficulties to communicate effectively. It has been found to be particularly successful with children on the autism spectrum.

Fundamentally the aim of PECS is to create a child who 'spontaneously initiates communicative interactions'(PECS training manual). It is very important to keep this notion at the forefront when working with a child who uses PECS as it underlines the key concepts behind the system.

Spontaneity – it is important that the spontaneous use of PECS be promoted. Storing PECS books out of a child's reach or use of phrases such as 'go and get your PECS book' inhibit the spontaneity of PECS which is one of its underlying principles. Over prompting must be avoided and sabotage strategies can help children become more confidently spontaneous in their use of PECS.

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Initiating communication –communication, especially at the early stages of teaching PECS, should be child led. PECS is a child’s personal communication system and must be within their control at all times. This can be facilitated in a range of ways but mainly by:

- having PECS book available at all times and in a place where the child knows where to find it
- motivating items (known as ‘reinforcers’) should be used to encourage communication
- controlling the environment and availability of favourite items to ‘manufacture’ situations for communication

How do we teach children to use PECS?

The teaching of PECS is done in a very structured way. At the initial stages children are taught to exchange a picture for a highly motivating item. Prior to commencing PECS training a thorough assessment should be conducted to identify what the pupil is motivated by.

The teaching of PECS is broken down into six phases:

Phase One

At this phase two adults (trainers) are involved in teaching the child how to make an exchange. One trainer is the communicative partner i.e. the person who accepts the picture and hands over the desired item; the other trainer is the prompter i.e. the person who physically prompts the child to make the exchange. At this stage no verbal prompting is given. It is much easier to ‘fade out’ physical prompting in a gradual way than to decrease reliance on verbal prompting.

Phase Two

Often children on the autism spectrum find learning acquired in one situation difficult to generalise to use in other situations. For this reason and also to promote independence and spontaneity children are taught at this early stage to ‘travel’ in order to make an exchange with the communicative partner. They are also taught at this stage to remove the picture from a communication book and to interact with a variety of communicative partners.

Phase Three

This phase is the beginning of teaching children to discriminate between pictures in order to make and communicate choice. There are many strategies which can be used to teach children the skill of discrimination but this usually begins with presenting the child with two pictures one of a motivating reinforcer and one of a disliked object or activity. This demonstrates to the trainer that the child is expressing a preference.

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Phase Four

PECS is a very versatile system in the sense that it can be extended as far as is accessible and meaningful to the child. At Phase Four sentence structure is introduced by adding a 'sentence strip' to the communication book and beginning to teach how to use it in conjunction with an 'I want' symbol. The 'I want' symbol is known as a 'sentence starter' and as a child becomes more proficient with the concept a range of other sentence starters can be introduced (see Phase Six). At this stage the use of 'attributes' can be introduced also. Again, this can be extended as far as is meaningful to child. Examples of attributes include colours, sizes, shapes, quantities etc.

Phase Five

Up until this phase the emphasis has been on totally spontaneous communication, verbal prompting should have been used minimally if at all. By the time children are at Phase Five they can begin to respond to 'What do you want?' questions but it is imperative to remain mindful to maintain spontaneous requests.

Phase Six

All phases prior to Phase Six centre around the child communicating for something they want. Obviously this is an activity with its own 'built in' rewards i.e. if a child is asking for a bag of crisps the reward comes when they receive it! At Phase Six commenting on things they see, hear or have is the aim for children

Communication Signposting

There is a communication sign outside of the door of each room in school. This signposting is designed to help children understand and orientate themselves in their environment and to assist them in making transitions around the building. See Appendix 1 for Guidance on Use of School Signage
Communication Issues related to specific Pupil Needs

Pupils at Newfield School may experience a wide variety of health, physical and learning needs which affect their ability to communicate with those around them. Some specific needs have communication issues associated with them and these are described in this policy to promote the understanding of staff when they are devising learning activities to meet pupil's needs.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Developmental communication in a child on the autism spectrum is often atypical. Below is a list of features of communication that are commonly associated with the autism spectrum.

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- Communication may be restricted to immediate needs rather than conversation
- Difficulties in understanding and using facial expression, gesture and body language.
- Difficulties in shared attention, commenting and pointing to share information
- Speech may be both odd in content and production, lacking in intent or failing to take listener needs into consideration
- Words may be used out of context and echolalia is common
- Poor control of speed, volume, and intonation may also be noticed e.g. talking loudly even though sitting right next to the listener
- Lack of awareness of the need to find a 'communication partner'
- Difficulties with sharing personal space or invading other's personal space when talking
- Poor receptive language skills and idiosyncratic response to sound
- Lack of consistency and continuity in terms of communication skills – particularly in relation to understanding
- Difficulties taking on board information via several different channels and 'processing delay'
- Literal interpretation of what has been said
- Little or (more commonly) inappropriate use of eye contact
- There is often a mismatch between expressive and receptive language skill

Hearing Impairment

Hearing loss in children is a frequent contributing factor in speech and language impairment. A hearing loss can cause a speech or language disorder in some cases, or it can worsen an already existing speech or language disorder. For this reason, a hearing test is usually a part of a full speech-language evaluation.

To be capable of good language output, you have to have adequate input, and for most languages (sign languages being the obvious exception) the input has to travel through the ears to get to the brain. Hearing loss in children results in limited access to the speech sounds, vocabulary, and grammatical structures of their language; if their hearing loss goes undiagnosed and untreated during the first few years of life, it can have a lasting negative effect on their speech and language development.

Staff at Newfield are given regular training with regard to Hearing Impairment and the maintenance of hearing aids.

In addition an HLTA has responsibility for checking and maintaining hearing aids on a weekly basis.

We have a service level agreement with the Hearing Impaired Advisory Service who visit school regularly.

Hearing Impaired pupils at Newfield face issues with regard to expressive and receptive language as well as other complex needs which affect their learning.

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In order to minimise the effects of a hearing impairment on pupils' learning we need to bear the following in mind:

- Staff need to check discreetly with the individual student that hearing aids and radio-aids are working and switched on;
- Stand or sit facing the deaf person and at the same level as them when communicating;
- Ensure that there are not bright lights or 'busy' backgrounds behind staff when communicating with the HI student;
- Staff should check that the HI student is looking before they begin to speak; get the students attention by saying their name before speaking.
- Background noise should be kept to a minimum; areas should be carpeted to minimise noise.
- Staff should speak clearly and with normal rhythm of speech;
- Use gestures and signs where these are relevant;
- Rephrase what has been said if the HI child has not understood;
- Write things down or illustrate things which need clarification;
- Check understanding by questioning.
- Teach specific key vocabulary for each different subject;
- Give time- time to talk and time to listen.

Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD)

Some pupils at Newfield School have needs which mean they may have very limited ways of communicating with others and their environment.

Pupils are likely to have:

- Severe developmental delay
- Impaired ability to communicate and interact with the environment
- Regressive conditions (in some instances)
- Multiple impairments – combinations of physical, sensory, epilepsy or other medical conditions
- Challenging or bizarre behaviours
- Lack of motivation, often passive and 'difficult to reach'.
- Difficulty understanding language, signs, symbols.
- Fleeting or inconsistent responses. (Responses which may be as small as a change in breathing or the blink of an eye)
- Difficulty maintaining eye contact.
- A short attention span
- Difficulty learning spontaneously
- Lack of awareness of themselves, others and the environment
- Difficulty interacting with others and the environment

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- Tactile defensiveness/tactile selectiveness

The ability to communicate is of paramount importance for all pupils. For a pupil with profound and multiple learning difficulties the efforts at communicating may require intense concentration and a great deal of sensitivity from adults to ensure that their message is received and returned. If no one responds and reflects back to them in a positive interactive way then their efforts go unnoticed and the desire to communicate will diminish.

Always begin a communication programme with what the pupil can already do. Remember that communication is not always co-operative – a pupil who resists is communicating. Make the most of responsive moods and match your pace of movement to their mood e.g. calm if they are quiet, active and noisy when they are active. Consider social distance – too close may be threatening, too far may make the interaction meaningless. Repetition and well known activities give a pupil a chance to direct and begin to control the interaction.

Emergent receptive communication skills will include early responses such as, startling, responding to human contact, tone of voice, facial expression. The pupil may look or move head/eyes in the direction of sound or change their body movement in response to sound, these changes may be as subtle as blinking or a change in breathing pattern.

Emerging expressive communication skills will include vocalising to express a need such as hunger or when uncomfortable. The pupil may cry, shout, or laugh to gain attention. They may make more than one sound and begin to play with these sounds by themselves, or when working with someone or in response to a familiar voice.

Body language is an important communication skill for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties. They will use their bodies to communicate in many different ways. The pupil will use facial expression to express pleasure, dislike, anticipation, recognition, frustration and boredom. They may lean towards the person working with them as an indication of 'more' or may stiffen to show rejection. They may 'still' whilst they concentrate. They may begin to reach or touch. Eye contact with people and objects is an important skill.

A two way interaction is the aim throughout at whatever level the pupil is at in their development of communication. This would lead to a level of spontaneous communication as skills are consolidated and mastered.

Visual Impairment

Visual impairment can change the conditions and dynamics of social interaction between children, their peers and their care givers. It is the effectiveness of adults in making these connections that is the key to overcoming some of the limits imposed by visual impairment.

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Sighted children have a panoramic view of their environment, they can see things they find interesting and seek them out, interact and engage. A child who has a severe visual impairment cannot easily monitor their own movements and their environments, therefore have difficulties in accessing and engaging in the world around them. They may become passive and unmotivated or develop a lack of confidence to explore and be motivated.

To enable a child who has a visual impairment engage in communication we have to:

- Know the child well - know how each individual child communicates, know what is interested in and may want to communicate about.
- Follow the key approaches in working with deaf blind children - building trust, being consistent, helping understanding, taking time, following the child and being supportive.
- Understand the factors affecting his or her communication at any given time.
- Encourage and give opportunities for them to use their senses to gain information.
 - what opportunities the child gets to communicate
 - what responses she/he gets
 - Whether the most appropriate communication modes and/or aids are being used consistently and skilfully.

Understanding comes before expression. A child will not be able to ask us for a drink, for example, unless she/he understands what a drink is, and that we can provide it. We need to make everything that happens to the child as understandable as possible.

Using consistent routines will help a child to recognise activities. Using cues to signal what will happen next will help the child to anticipate. Cues may use any sensory channel available to the child - they may be objects, sounds, smells, places, movements and/or pictures. They may occur naturally (for example, the smell of cooking and the sound of the dinner trolley) or be deliberately introduced (for example, songs for particular activities).

Some deafblind children may not yet be aware that their actions can influence what others do. These children communicate unintentionally, through others interpreting their actions and giving them meaning. Many children who communicate intentionally do so in very concrete ways - for example, pulling an adult towards something they want.

A huge range of communication modes are used by deaf blind people - speech, gesture, body movement, changes in facial expression, objects and many more. Some of these are readily understandable to other people. Others require good observation skills and knowledge of the individual. Still others require training to be used effectively.

The following list gives a few examples:

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- Non-verbal communication (intentional or unintentional) - includes body movements (including much that may be identified as challenging behaviour), changes in breathing pattern, eye pointing, vocalising and taking others to wanted objects or activities.
- Symbol systems - include objects of reference (using objects as symbols, usually for activities, focusing on a tactile approach), pictures, photos and formal symbol systems such as Bliss symbols.
- Sign systems and languages - include British Sign Language Makaton signing and idiosyncratic sign systems developed by or for a specific person. Signing may be adapted to meet individual needs, for example by restricting the size and spacing of signs ('visual frame signing') or by placing one person's hands over or under those of the other person signing.
- Speech-based methods - include clear speech and lip reading.
- Text-based methods - include fingerspelling, the deaf blind manual alphabet, large print, Braille and Moon.
- Total Communication is an approach using a wide range of different communication methods.
- Communication aids include HACs (Human Aids to Communication, such as interpreters) and switch-operated electronic communication aids.

English as an Additional Language (EAL)

Bi-lingualism is celebrated in school. There is an understanding that a sound knowledge of home language is the most crucial tool in facilitating the learning of English, therefore we aim to develop children's understanding and competence in their home language alongside English.

We recognise and celebrate:

- a child's first language is important in terms of their identity, self-esteem and sense of place in our community
- the use of first language may be necessary to ensure the cognitive development of the child. If a lack of proficiency in English is a barrier to the academic learning and understanding of concepts we will strive to employ first language to enable the child to make progress.
- Some children may have acquired concepts and understanding in their first language which may need establishing in English (e.g. literate in first language)
- Languages develop in stages and that a child can develop an additional language more effectively from the basis of a sound first language.
- home life plays an important part in a child's education and will therefore acknowledge the importance of and use first language to help children to bring their home culture, language and experience into school and vice versa
- bilingualism is a special achievement
- We have a responsibility to convey that all languages are equally valid.

The following can be factors for pupils who have English as an Additional Language (EAL) and should be considered in planning approaches to teaching or communicating with pupils

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- Certain words may mean different things to some pupil depending on culture or background
- Different dialects can cause confusion in same language
- Difficult transition in alternating direction of text, i.e. Urdu is written right to left
- Mixture of words from more than one language can restrict fluency in a particular language
- Delay in translating back to first language, analysing and then understanding the words
- Lack of scaffolding from basic words to instructions which expects the listener to comprehend the context even though they are not culturally or linguistically aware
- Unacceptable behaviour displayed that is apposite at home
- Little use of pupil's first language
- Little assistance from parents who themselves are not fluent in English
- Lower learning expectations when little progress is made
- Unacceptable behaviour from the frustration in not being understood
- Withdrawn from those who do not share the common language
- Feelings of isolation as peers unable to communicate
- Unable to recognise unfamiliar objects and its purpose
- Unwillingness to participate in activities because they cannot grasp the instructions

In order to enhance the provision for children at Newfield School with EAL we strive to increase our staffing so that it reflects more accurately the ethnic profile of our school. When organising staffing each year we consider the linguistic profile of each department to ensure that there are members of staff who are able to support children with EAL in the classes.

Professional Development

Where specific approaches are essential to meet the communication needs of pupils training will be given to enable staff to teach and communicate effectively with pupils. Speech and Language Therapists will give advice pertaining to the specific needs of individuals.

When new staff are inducted to Newfield School part of their training package relates to communication and the differing needs they may encounter during the course of their work.

Practical tips for communicating effectively with children and young people at Newfield School

- Get down to the pupil's eye level when communicating with them

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- Keep spoken language to a minimum when giving information and focus on key information carrying words
- Say the pupil's name to get their attention before communicating with them
- Give plenty of time: time to talk and time to listen
- Reduce noise/ distractions in the environment
- Acknowledge and respond to ALL attempts to communicate
- Ensure meaningful choices are offered throughout the day
- Always communicate with pupils with respect and courtesy
- Never talk about pupils 'over their heads' or as if they are not there
- If a pupil uses a communication aid ensure it is always available to them and well maintained

Equality Duty

Newfield School complies with the general and specific duties of the Equality Act (2010). In accordance with the duty we publish information that demonstrates that we have due regard to the need to;

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination
- Advance equality of opportunity
- Foster good relations

These specific duties have been considered in relation to all our policies and procedures in school. Our objectives will be reported on and published as part of the Governance public documents available for inspection under the Freedom of Information Regulations and Data Protection duties and in the school newsletter to parents.

Safeguarding

Newfield School is committed to safeguarding and protecting the welfare of children and vulnerable adults as its number one priority

Full copies of Policies and Procedures related to all aspects of Safeguarding, and the Complaints Policy, are available on request from Rachel Kay, Head Teacher and Designated Senior Lead for Safeguarding and Child Protection.