



Total Communication Policy

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At Fairfield School we believe that communication is at the centre of successful education and that every student deserves to 'have a voice' and can develop a range of methods to convey their wants, opinions, feelings and needs.

Communication can be defined as a meaningful interaction between two or more individuals to request, resist, choose, comment and develop social relationships. Our ultimate vision for all students is that they will establish a system of, expressive and receptive communication in whatever form is appropriate to them. The method of communication can take many forms and can include one or a combination of the following:

- Body language
- Facial expressions
- Eye contact
- Gestures and pointing
- Makaton signing
- Intensive Interaction
- Vocalisations
- Use of objects of reference and body cues
- Use of PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System)
- Use of photographs
- Use of symbols/drawings
- Use of Visual Support Systems- Now and Next Boards, Visual Timetables
- Use of AAC (Alternative and Augmentative Communication)- No tech, Low tech communication systems and High tech communication systems
- Speech

At Fairfield School we adopt a "Total Communication Approach" to communication. This means that all methods of communication are recognised and valued equally as forms of interaction. Communication underpins all areas of the curriculum and allows students to access learning and develop social relationships. Communication is central to the entire curriculum and students are presented with opportunities to develop their communication skills throughout the school day in a personalised way.

Aims:

- To respect each student's communication style and ability and their right to communicate and have "a voice"
- Teachers to write SMART communication targets that are regularly reviewed through the EHCP and in their PLG's (Personal Learning Goals) assessed through the Evidence for Learning App (EFL)
- To meet the communication potential of every student using a Total Communication Approach personalised for them

- To create an environment where students, staff and visitors can communicate with each other through a range of means

Approaches to Communication and Interventions

At Fairfield we use a range of different communication methods to interact with our students, both low and high tech. We do not follow one approach as the needs of our students vary.

Intensive Interaction

Intensive Interaction is a practical approach for people at the early stages of development who do not find it easy communicating. It works on early interaction abilities- how to enjoy being with other people- to relate, interact, know, understand and practice communication routines. Intensive Interaction teaches and develops the "Fundamentals of Communication" such as: use and understanding of eye contact, facial expression, vocalisations leading to speech, taking turns in exchanges of conversation and the structure of conversation. By copying the actions or vocalisations of a student, we can help support them to develop the ideas that communication can influence interaction with our environment.

Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)

The Picture Exchange Communication System is a form of augmentative and alternative communication. It is a structured approach to developing communication with a student by 'exchanging' a photograph or picture symbol for a desired item. PECS is a very structured approach and has a defined hierarchy that has to be followed for it to become a successful communication system. PECS consists of six phases and begins by teaching an individual to give a single picture of a desired item or action to a "communicative partner" who immediately honours the exchange as a request. The system goes on to teach discrimination of pictures and how to put them together in sentences.

Objects of Reference and Object Cues

The terms Object cues and Objects of Reference refer to the use of objects as a means of communication. They can be used to develop understanding, to help anticipation and memory and to develop choice. For students who are working with objects, an object of reference can help cue them into an activity.

Photographs

Photographs can help students begin to develop their symbolic understanding of the world around them. A photograph supports the students to develop a link between the visual representation of an object or event and the real thing. Photographs not only develop understanding but can also be used to establish expressive communication e.g. choice making or requesting.

Symbols

Symbols are used consistently throughout school. This is done, where appropriate, through labelling the school environment, use of symbols on voice output devices, symbol books as low-tech communication aids, the use of picture exchange communication systems and use of choice boards/ mats. Once the symbols are established by the student the same size and the same symbol picture are used consistently. Symbols can be used with the written word underneath which can support students with their reading and pattern matching skills. Students who use symbols as a means of expressive communication must have access to their symbols at all times so they can initiate interactions.

Makaton

Makaton is a language programme that uses signs and symbols to help people to communicate. Signs and symbols are used along with speech and gesture, facial expression, eye contact and body language. Makaton is designed to support spoken language and the signs and symbols are used with speech in

spoken word order. Makaton helps to simplify language as only the keywords in a sentence are signed. At Fairfield we use Makaton signs to support and develop receptive, expressive and functional communication skills. It is used by staff as part of a total communication approach to support students understanding of language and facilitate and encourage their expressive communication even if that student does not use signed Makaton expressively.

Colourful Semantics

Colourful semantics is an approach created by Alison Bryan. It is aimed at helping students to develop their grammar but it is routed in the meaning of words (semantics). Some students use colourful semantics to support their understanding of language.

See and Learn

See and Learn Language and Reading is designed to teach students with Down syndrome and other learning needs early vocabulary, sight words, simple phrases and sentences, and grammar rules. Learning to read offers the students concrete and visual representations of language concepts to support the development of their spoken language skills.

Social Stories

A Social Story is a story that shares social information with an autistic child or adult in an accessible way, respectful of their different perspectives and interpretations of the social world. It is written in a specific way according to ten defining characteristics (the Social Story criteria) which guide it to be meaningful, safe, patient, non-judgemental and reassuring. Social Stories describe anything and everything in life.

Sensory Stories

A Sensory Story is often a short recognisable story where each line or every few lines will be accompanied by sensory stimuli. By using sensory stories, students who may have language difficulties can experience stories in the same way as others by using items such as a drum to build tension. When these sensory stories are combined with the right type of instrument or other stimuli, the sensory effect will almost recount the story without needing the words. This can be a brilliant, exciting and immersive experience for our students.

AAC

AAC refers to methods of communication that supplement or replace spoken (or written) communication. This includes signing, use of symbols, supportive writing software, gesture as well as electronic voice output communication aids (VOCAs) including apps on electronic devices. All of these are used at Fairfield School. They can also be used to support a student's understanding, by providing them with a more permanent visual representation of language.

- **No-tech communication** needs no extra equipment – it is sometimes called “unaided communication”. Examples include body language, gestures, pointing, eye pointing, facial expressions, vocalisations and signing.
- **Low-tech communication systems** do not need power to function. They are sometimes called “aided communication” because they use basic equipment. Examples include: pen and paper to write or draw; alphabet and word boards; communication charts or books with pictures, photos and symbols; particular objects that represent what someone needs to understand or say.
- **High-tech communication systems** use batteries or mains power. Most gadgets or software speak and/or produce text. Some are based on familiar equipment such as mobile devices, tablets and laptops and may have simple buttons or pages that speak when touched. Very sophisticated

systems use equipment specially designed to support communication. Hi-tech communication is also sometimes called "aided communication" because it uses equipment.

Spoken Word

Spoken communication is made up of speech sounds, word meanings, putting words into sentences and grammar. The use of speech is always encouraged and we provide models of clear speech and language for the students. Some of our students use the spoken word to communicate. They may have difficulties with the organisation, clarity and fluency of speech sounds and words. At Fairfield we focus on functional communication i.e. the student must be able to express their wants, needs, feelings appropriately in everyday situations, this maybe with speech and/or supported by other forms of communication.

At Fairfield we identify and emphasise the importance of developing and sustaining communication across all areas of learning. We aim to give our students the most effective mode of functional communication in relation to their needs and learning potential. We work together with parents and a team of school staff and outside agencies which include Occupational Therapists (OT), Physiotherapists (PT), School Nurses, Speech and Language Therapists (SALT), Barnsley Assistive Technology to ensure that communication skills can be incorporated into all environments that our students' access.

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