

# Total Communication Policy



## STATEMENT OF INTENT

Acorns School is a GLD primary special school situated in Preston, Lancashire. The pupils here at Acorns, have a wide range of learning disabilities, which may also be compounded by visual or hearing impairments, challenging behaviour or complex medical needs. We provide a happy, safe and caring environment in which to learn where all our children are celebrated and encouraged to meet their full potential.

Our pupils need educational opportunities which meet the educational, social and emotional needs of each child. At Acorns we plan engaging and relevant teaching and learning experiences that take account of both individual needs (as defined by an Educational, Health and Care lan) and the requirements of the National Curriculum.

## AIMS AND PURPOSE

The aim of this policy is to:

Set out clear and consistent strategies to meet the diverse communication needs of our pupils in order to equip them for life and enable them to operate successfully within their own environment and the wider community.

Identify the ways in which Acorns Primary School will provide and maintain a successful communication environment, which allows all children the opportunity to develop his/her language and communication across the curriculum.

Promote regular liaison between parents/carers and professionals to ensure continuous and consistent communication experiences at home and school.

## TOTAL COMMUNICATION AT ACORNS PRIMARY

Communication occurs all the time, throughout every aspect of school and home life. It is how relationships are established and maintained, how we express our thoughts and feelings, make choices, learn and achieve increased independence. Communication is an integral part of healthy development and a basic human right. Therefore it is vital that we make communication accessible to all pupils at Acorns Primary by allowing them to give and receive information in any way available to us. This is the aim of our Total Communication approach.

Total Communication involves using any means of communication to allow access to the curriculum and to participate in everyday life experiences. It shifts the focus away from a reliance on spoken and written communication to a culture where gestures, body language, signs, symbols, photographs, objects of reference and electronic aids are used in a consistent manner to support speech or as an alternative to speech.

## AUGMENTATIVE AND ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION (AAC)

AAC refers to any means by which spoken communication is *supplemented* or *replaced*. Communication may range from any movement or behaviour that is observed and interpreted by another person as meaningful, to the use of a code agreed upon between people where items have specific meanings, ie a language.

AAC is appropriate for all those children at Acorns who have difficulty with receptive and expressive language due to physical, sensory or learning disability.

## UNAIDED AND AIDED COMMUNICATION

AAC can be divided into unaided and aided communication.

Unaided communication can be described as communication modes that use only the user's body. These include:

- Body language, eye pointing, facial expression, natural gesture, use of vocalisation/intonation, sensory stimulation

- Makaton - the signed vocabulary used at Acorns
- Verbal/gestural strategies used to compensate for poor speech (eg cued articulation, cued speech)

Aided communication can be described as communication modes that require equipment in addition to the communicator's body. These include:

- Objects of reference, photographs, pictures, graphic symbols (eg Picture Communication Symbols or Pecs),
- Communication aids, which produce speech and/or text or VOCAs (Voice Output Communication Aids).

### **Interventions**

All interventions at Acorns will be carried out in conjunction with Class Teachers, Specialist Teachers and Teaching Support Assistants with the emphasis on developing sustainability. We aim to develop the skills and knowledge of all staff and parents so that the children's communication skills can continue to be developed by those who work with them on a daily basis.

Speech and Language Therapists respond to the needs of the school, contributing to the school improvement plan as required and providing quality training on topics which education staff, their managers and therapists have identified as priorities. Training of staff is a key activity with the aim of maximising the impact on the child.

Our Total Communication team work alongside Speech and Language professionals to help facilitate the delivery of effective communication strategies and support and cascade the necessary training within school.

Education and Health Services will work together to provide effective support where children's speech, language, communication, confidence and learning are facilitated within the school environment.

### **Speech and Language Therapy (SALT)**

Speech and Language Therapists adopt a Consultative Approach, they work in conjunction with the Speech and Language Therapy Assistant(s), school staff, and parents to assess the communication needs of the child.

Assessment may involve observation in the classroom, teacher discussion and individual assessments.

Following assessment, the SALTs advice and plans are carried out throughout the day by school staff and parents/carers to the majority of our pupils. This is the Universal Approach.

Those pupils on the SALTs case load may also receive targeted provision with school staff carrying out the programme. A few of our pupils will need specialist provision from the Therapy team, targeting specific Total Communication areas and/or specific pupils. It is expected that pupils will use a combination of these three types of provision as and when their communication needs develop/change.

General advice is also given to staff regarding the development of pupils' communication skills and whole staff training, as required.

The Speech and Language Team can be contacted on 01772 777318

### **Teaching and Learning Styles**

The teaching of communication skills takes place throughout the school day, and is addressed in all subject lessons, in particular, but not only, the Spoken Language element of the English curriculum (Please see policy). Communication skills will 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, or electronic communication aids.

Teaching staff will use non verbal communication, such as symbols, Makaton signing, and gesture, as appropriate, to aid pupil understanding. Speech will be 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 After School Club. During whole school activities, e.g., assembly, Makaton signing (sign of the week) and Makaton symbols are used to support communication. Symbols and communication aids should also be used as part of displays in corridors and classrooms.

### **Planning**

A Total Communication Team led by Rachel Short, comprises of staff (communication champions) in conjunction with SALT. They will meet regularly, to discuss and decide upon the Total Communication needs of individuals and the implications of these for the school. At these meetings, uniformity of signs and symbols are agreed upon and transferred back into the classroom situation.

Meetings are chaired by the coordinator (Rachel Short) with responsibility for Total Communication throughout the school. Minutes are taken of these meetings, which are then passed on to class or department representatives, and a copy passed on to the senior leadership team. Each class teacher is responsible for detailing the communication needs and strategies, which are relevant to the needs of individuals within that class. Advice and support is available from the Total Communication Group if required.

### **Assessment and Recording**

Assessment takes place through individual class teachers and is assessed in termly summaries and the Annual Review or EHCP report.

Direct class observation will be evidenced through photographs, video, taped recordings and student work.

### **Reporting**

Student experiences in all aspects of the curriculum, are reported to parents/carers in the Annual Review.

Parents/carers have the opportunity to discuss each subject with the pupil's teacher and a member of the senior management team at the Annual Review meeting.

Home/School diaries will be exchanged daily allowing both school and parents to share and ask for information. Parents/carers will also be invited to both class and whole school events throughout the year. Interim reports will be sent home at the end of the Autumn and Spring terms with a more in depth, final report being sent home towards the end of the academic year. Parents/Carers will be invited to attend a Parent's Evening to discuss this final report and any other relevant matters.

## **Inset and Support**

All staff are welcome to attend Total Communication meetings, as mentioned under Planning and to evaluate and review the Total Communication Policy and advise on the support and development of Total Communication throughout the school.

The Total Communication Group and coordinator are available to give help and support to all staff on related issues.

Total Communication Policy and In-service training opportunities are provided by SALTs and the Total Communication co-ordinator.

The Total Communication Coordinator will work alongside the Speech & Language Therapists to give regular support to classes and individuals to help support the needs of pupils with specific communication and speech difficulties.

## **Parents/Carers**

Parents/carers may be involved in the pupil's total communication needs and development through the following:

- Encouraging the continuity of total communication skills at home.
- Meeting with Speech Therapist and Total Communication Coordinator to discuss their child's needs and progress.
- Attending introductory workshops provided by the Total Communication Team on relevant subjects such as Makaton signs and symbols, Symbol Exchange and Eating and Drinking workshops.

## **Cross Curricular Links**

Communication skills are used and developed in all areas of the curriculum which allows for individual Learning Journey 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**

Communication targets and termly objectives for speaking and listening are differentiated to meet the specific needs of individual pupils. Activities are planned that allow for the inclusion of all pupils as active participants within lessons.

### **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, scrutiny of lesson plans, evaluation of targets, monitoring of SALT programmes, etc. This policy will be reviewed on a regular basis. Any suggested amendments will be presented to the governors for discussion and shared with staff.